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Music-making in Realms of Pleasure

Songs, Sentiments, and Seduction
in Ming Era Courtesanship (1368-1644)



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Department of Music

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Abstract

The Ming era in China (1368-1644) witnessed a thriving courtesan culture, which this dissertation explores through detailed original analysis of diverse primary sources including poetry, lyrics in song books, woodblock illustrations, novels and short stories, and treatises and commentaries by Ming period theorists. Here, the focus is especially on the later period (1572-1644) in the Jiangnan region, widely recognised as the heartland of courtesan culture. The current study approaches this topic from a variety of perspectives, applying interdisciplinary lenses to address the following issues and generate new insights: What genres, forms, topics, and themes were explored within the Ming courtesans' song repertoire? What contexts did the courtesans perform in, and what styles, modes of performance, and instruments prevailed? What emotions were expressed and elicited via the courtesans' music? What sounds characterised the courtesans' lived-in soundscapes, and what sentiments did they signify? How were courtship processes structured, and what seduction strategies were commonly used by the courtesans? Chapter 2 presents the first comprehensive examination of a much over-looked yet crucial songbook relating to courtesan-ranking activities in Ming era Suzhou, *Wu Ji Bai Mei* (Seductive Courtesans of the Suzhou Area). Chapter 3 considers the full range of contexts in which courtesans performed, offering a new system of categorisation and pinpointing the types of interaction that characterised them. Chapter 4 revisits the definitions of *qing* (emotion) and related concepts, innovatively identifies a love process between courtesans and clients, explores different expressions of emotion through the medium of poetry and song texts. Using *Jin Ping Mei* as a case study, Chapter 5 delves into the soundscapes in which courtesans lived, investigating some of the most symbolic elements such as the calls of birds. Employing modern human behaviour and courtship studies, Chapter 6 identifies a five-phase courtship process and probes the courtesans' use of seduction. Through this broad yet in-depth study, I seek to reveal how songs, sentiments and seduction interacted with each other and were embedded in the realms of pleasure where these female entertainers lived and worked.

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In memory of my grandmother, may her soul rest in peace.

1. Introduction

Courtesanship is a common yet varied cultural phenomenon that has recurred in diverse periods and places. From ancient Greek courtesans to Japanese geishas, these women have played distinctive roles in patriarchal civilisations. To be a qualified entertainer, service provider, and companion in realms of pleasure, courtesans have been expected to be captivating and intelligent, to excel in interpersonal communication, and to have a certain level of artistic skill. Due to their typically low social status, historical records of the life experiences of courtesans are generally limited. However, since the 1970s, scholars have begun to interpret and re-evaluate courtesan-related historical issues.¹ Thus, it becomes possible to reveal more of the historical circumstances and the real faces of these female entertainers.

As in other cultures, courtesanship within the Chinese context is a significant socio-cultural phenomenon that has played essential social roles throughout history, though these women were often neglected by the official historical records. Fortunately, their activities have been well documented within diverse unofficial primary sources. Although the scope of this work will embrace the entire Ming era (1368-1644), I lay special emphasis on the courtesan culture in the Jiangnan area in the late-Ming period (1572-1644) because there is ample historical evidence that courtesanship was especially flourishing there at that time.

My research is centred around the following questions: What genres, forms, topics, and themes were explored within the Ming courtesans' song repertoire? What contexts did the courtesans perform in, and what styles, modes of performance, and instruments prevailed? What emotions were expressed and elicited via the courtesans' music? What sounds characterised the courtesans' lived-in soundscapes, and what sentiments did they signify? How were courtship processes structured, and what seduction strategies were commonly used by the courtesans?

¹ To list a few studies: Ellen Koskoff, *Women and Music in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987); Georgina Masson, *Courtesans of the Italian Renaissance* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1975); Cecilia Segawa Seigle, *Yoshiwara : The Glittering World of the Japanese Courtesan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993).

1.1 Methodologies

Establishing a detailed picture of musical activities in a pre-modern era frequently requires much more than a monolithic method and this is certainly the case in respect to Chinese culture. There are numerous challenges at play in undertaking the proposed project. This includes, for example, the fact that Chinese musical notation, *gong chi* notation 工尺谱, did not appear until the end of the eighteenth century.² Needless to say, the most widely used research methods for exploring ethnomusicology and human behaviour – namely, interview, observation and self-report³ – are not viable in this historical context. Yet the Ming period courtesans and the details of their practices are by no means inaccessible. For this particular study, I mainly conduct a close reading and detailed critical analysis of the representation of courtesans' practices in Ming period primary texts from various literary genres, including poems, fiction, drama scripts, literary notes, and personal anthologies. I also use contemporaneous historical pictorial representations, such as paintings and woodblock illustrations, to combine textual sources with visual art works, with a view to reconstructing a more truthful picture of the courtesans' artistic practices. Moreover, I also draw from modern studies about Ming era ideological trends, performance theories, the discipline of music psychology (relating specifically to emotion), soundscape study, and seduction and courtship studies. Using an interdisciplinary approach, I aim to reveal the Ming courtesans' musical lives, their dynamic relationship with the literati community, and their ambivalent position within the feudal patriarchal society.

Some scholars have pessimistically argued that almost all accounts of ancient courtesans are fictitious, since they left no fully verifiable voice.⁴ I argue, however, that the voices of these female performers are by no means untraceable. Possible approaches include

² Judith T. Zeitlin, "'Notes of Flesh' and the Courtesan's Song in Seventeenth-Century China," in *The Courtesan's Arts: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, ed. Martha Feldman and Bonnie Gordon (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 78.

³ Monica M. Moore, "Human nonverbal courtship behavior — A brief historical review," *Journal of Sex Research* 47, no. 2-3 (2010): 171, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/00224490903402520>.

⁴ Christopher A. Faraone, "The Masculine Arts of the Ancient Greek Courtesan: Male Fantasy or Female Representation?," in *The Courtesan's Arts: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, ed. Martha Feldman and Bonnie Gordon (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 209.

reading texts written by male literati and artworks depicting them, and investigating some public-domain arts of no known authorship (folk songs and suchlike). For example, in the collection of *Shan'ge* 山歌 (Mountain Songs) compiled by the late-Ming literati Feng Menglong, a large number of song texts were closely related to the lives of low-status prostitutes and courtesans that were active in urban areas.⁵ Even though these literary and art creations completed by male authors could not represent the real voice of low-status women entertainers, they have indeed provided crucial approaches for later scholars to understand the practices and life experiences of ancient courtesans.

Here, like all academics focusing on historical culture, I must confront the difference between representation and reality, openly acknowledge that we are dealing with artistic representation, and remain honourably agnostic about what really occurred in brothels and bedchambers. The line between the idealised, fanciful depictions of the courtesans by the literati and the reality of the courtesans' arts and life is not always clear. For instance, the problem — familiar to historians of sexuality — is that pre-modern sources usually disclose less about sexual behaviour than they do about the representation of sexual behaviour. Nevertheless, although representation and reality are not identical, to be sure, there must be overlap between the real history and the history in written accounts. Courtesans had an interest in living up to cultural ideals, after all, and the literati's accounts must surely be closely based on reality, even if they offered a somewhat partial and selective vision of lived experience.

Furthermore, it is essential to explain the translational approach I adopted for this research, given that it involves interpreting a vast number of Ming primary sources. Unlike highly inflected languages such as Latin, where words act like solid bricks to construct intricate and expansive passages,⁶ the Chinese language is characterized by its conciseness. There are frequent omissions of subjects and verbs, and flexibility in parts of speech, allowing a single character to function as a verb, noun, adjective, adverb, and more.

⁵ Feng Menglong, *Gua zhi'er shan'ge taixia xinzou* 挂枝儿 山歌 太霞新奏 [Hanging branches, mountain Songs, new music of taixia], Feng Menglong wenxue quanji 冯梦龙文学全集 [A complete collection of Feng Menglong's literature], (Shenyang: Liaohai Press, 2002).

⁶ James Liu, *The Art of Chinese Poetry* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 45-46.

Firstly, the subjects of verbs are frequently omitted, relying on the reader's interpretations based on context and content.⁷ For example, in *Wu Ji Bai Mei* (Seductive courtesans of the Suzhou area), we encounter the following verse: “月下踏梅影，风前弱柳枝”，which literally translates as “Under the moon, treading plum shadow; weak willow branches before the wind.”⁸ The intentional omission of the subject is sometimes due to the fact that the subject is obvious to the reader, and at other times to leave some space for imagination and interpretation. To maintain the concise nature of the original verse and also convey the meaning as accurately as possible, I have translated the verse as: “Under the moon, I tread in the plum shadows, the weak willow branches swaying in the wind.” In this case, there is nothing in the context or content to suggest a particular subject.

Secondly, Chinese poetry sometimes omits verbs, and verses can be made up of a series of nouns, also omitting conjunctions, and particles. For instance, the following verse uses only four nouns to portray the imagery of a courtesan missing her lover: “Ends of the earth horse hooves, the emerald eyebrows before lamp...天涯马蹄，灯前翠眉...”⁹ The first half of the line indicates that the lover is far away (galloping on his horse), while the second half depicts a woman grooming herself in front of a lamp. According to English language conventions, I have adjusted the order of words, added the subject, and translated this sentence as “Horse hooves at the end of the world, my emerald eyebrows before the lamp.”

Thirdly, the parts of speech in Chinese poetry are fluid. Words can be interpreted flexibly, as noun, verb, and adjective according to different contexts and word order. In the following example, the word *shi* 湿 (wet) can be used as a verb although its original meaning is an adjective or noun. The first example is a song lyric, titled “Every Footstep Coquettish” with *shi* working as an adjective: “Strings of pearl-like tears making the blue

⁷ James Liu, *The Art of Chinese Poetry*, 40-41.

⁸ Wanyuzi, *Wu ji bai mei* 吴姬百媚 [Seductive courtesans of the Suzhou area] (Beijing: Beijing tu shu guan chu ban she, 2002). The English translation here is literal translation.

⁹ Wang Qi, Hong Bozhao, and Xie Boyang, *Yuan Ming Qing sanqu xuan* 元明清散曲选 [A selection of sanqu from the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties] (Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, 1988), 245. Literary translation.

shirt wet. 行行珠泪青衫湿。”¹⁰ In the next example, *shi* is a verb: “Drizzle wets the roses...细雨湿蔷薇...”¹¹ Such ellipsis and fluidity attributes literary beauty to Chinese poetry, but it also brings difficulties to translators.

Next, I will clarify some principles of my approaches to translation. Accuracy is the primary goal, aiming to convey the meaning embodied in the original Chinese texts as closely and as stylistically consistently as possible. This is because, unlike poetry translators, my research focuses more on the text itself, in order to explore Ming era courtesans’ music (mainly focusing on song texts) and its artistic and emotional implications. Of course, however, I also aim to convey the beauty of the Chinese poetry to English readers, which requires detailed and complex work. It must be pointed out here that it is impossible to convey aspects of the original Chinese phonology in the English translation, as the phonology and syntax of English and Chinese are very different. Parts or words that are considered ambiguous and require further explanations will be clarified in footnotes. In addition, I follow the literary genre of the original texts, rather than translate what was originally a poem or song-text into a “poetic approximation”.¹² I maintain the original transitions and attempt to adhere to the original phrasing whenever possible. Although rhyming is one of the essences of Chinese poetry, it is a major challenge to maintain rhyme schemes in translation, and I have not endeavoured to do so.

For the sake of consistency, the names, book titles, and references in this research are presented in Simplified Chinese with Pinyin (the romanization system for Standard Mandarin), even though the primary sources were recorded in Traditional Chinese. The names of people (authors of quotations, ancient scholars, and others) are presented in the form of surname plus first name, following Chinese traditions. The exceptions are the Chinese names of scholars writing in English who use an inverted order in their own publications. Additionally, unless otherwise noted, the English translations in this thesis were done by the

¹⁰ Wanyuzi, *Wu ji bai mei* 吴姬百媚 [Seductive courtesans of the Suzhou area].

¹¹ Wang Qi, Hong Bozhao, and Xie Boyang, *Yuan Ming Qing sanqu xuan* 元明清散曲选 [A selection of *sanqu* from the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties] (Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, 1988), 245.

¹² Burton Raffel, *The Art of Translating Poetry* (University Park PA: The Penn State University Press, 2021), 36.

current author. If translations by others are used, they are specifically noted in square brackets directly after the passage.

1.2 Literature Review

I divide this literature review into three main categories: studies of courtesanships beyond Chinese contexts, Ming era primary sources, and modern studies on Ming period courtesanship. This thesis also employs theories from other academic fields, including performance theory (elaborated in Chapter 3), music and emotion (Chapter 4), soundscape studies (Chapter 5), and seduction and courtship studies (Chapter 6). These studies will not be detailed in this literature review section but will be further expounded in the relevant chapters.

1.2.1 Courtesanships Beyond China

Understanding the general defining characteristics of the courtesans' occupation in different times and spaces is essential for recouping the Ming period courtesans' music-making. Martha Feldman and Bonnie Gordon's 2006 work *The Courtesan's Arts: Cross-Cultural Perspectives* is a good starting-point for this thesis. Sharing a common object of study – the courtesan's arts –, the research scope of their book is extensive, covering courtesanships from ancient Greece, Renaissance Italy, precolonial India, to Edo Japan and pre-modern China. Feldman and Gordon have noted some recurring features shared amongst courtesan cultures of different contexts: as “obscure objects of desire”, courtesans are “gracious and deferential, yet mobile in status and sometimes even in class”;¹³ they are considered the “highly educated, creative, and skilled women” of their time,¹⁴ and “often indistinguishable from women born into higher classes” as they emulated their fashions.¹⁵

¹³ Martha Feldman and Bonnie Gordon, *The Courtesan's Arts: Cross-Cultural Perspectives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 3.

¹⁴ Feldman and Gordon, *The Courtesan's Arts: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, 5.

¹⁵ Feldman and Gordon, *The Courtesan's Arts: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, 6.

These temporally and geographically distant courtesan cultures shared remarkably similar characteristics, because the societies that nurtured them shared similar socioeconomic and cultural trends as well: highly stratified; undergoing modernization from a feudal to bourgeois society; evidencing a newly risen mercantilism accelerating cultural production and, in turn, leading to increased social mobility; and “marriage systems that separate love and sexual passion from the institution of matrimony.”¹⁶ Particularly relevant to this study, these very same features are highly prevalent, even defining aspects, of the mid to late Ming society, which gave birth to an extremely prosperous courtesan culture. Another illuminating study for this dissertation is Frank Kouwenhoven and James Kippen’s 2013 book. Using an interdisciplinary approach (drawing from biology, anthropology, and ethnomusicology), the book explores the interactions between music, dance, and the art of seduction in a wide range of cultural contexts – focusing on communities ranging from South Indian courtesans to American female exotic dancers.¹⁷

Although courtesans have been socially inferior in a variety of cultural contexts, their profession has ironically required them to acquire a range of literary, artistic, and musical skills considered to be refined. In his 2006 article about ancient Greek courtesans, Christopher A. Faraone argues that these female entertainers co-opted various arts that were almost exclusively associated with men in order to assert their autonomy and independence in a culture that had no notion of the truly autonomous and independent woman.¹⁸ Doris M. Srinivasan’s 2006 study focuses on pre-colonial Indian courtesans. She proposes that, in Hindu societies, where hierarchies were exceptionally strict and where chastity was greatly demanded of ordinary women, courtesans were believed to possess great sexual power. This power was derived from two sources, one based on the fertility energy released by her acts (frequent sexual intercourse and dancing), the other based on the immediacy of the knowledge

¹⁶ Feldman and Gordon, *The Courtesan's Arts: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, 6.

¹⁷ Frank Kouwenhoven and James Kippen, *Music, dance and the art of seduction* (Delft, Netherlands: Eburon Academic Publishers, 2012).

¹⁸ Christopher A. Faraone, "The Masculine Arts of the Ancient Greek Courtesan: Male Fantasy or Female Representation?," in *The Courtesan's Arts: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, ed. Martha Feldman and Bonnie Gordon (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

of the divine that she claimed. Srinivasan also points out that both the educated courtesans and the *devadasi* were defenders and contributors to the artistic, cultural, and religious life of India.¹⁹ Lisa Nielson's 2017 research focuses on the performing arts of the pre-modern Islamic courtesan, *Qayna* or *Qiyān* (trained artistic women or singing girls). She points out that the education of an Islamic courtesan required a wide range of training, including music, Arabic, reading, recitation, court etiquette, and even the art of seduction. In addition, despite their proven musical skills, courtesans were considered morally in a grey area due to their stigmatised status.²⁰

Courtesans do have the capacity and space to express themselves, although this power is usually enjoyed by the most famous ones. In any profession, those at the top always enjoy privileges and rights that are beyond the reach of the rest.²¹ This can also be applied to courtesanships. High-class courtesans often enjoyed a certain degree of social power and lived a life of luxury unattainable by lower-class prostitutes – fancy clothing, fine jewellery, proper etiquette, and, above all, the opportunity to be well trained in literature and the arts, as well as to associate with men of social influence.²² A typical example is the famous Renaissance Venetian courtesan Veronica Franco, who succeeded in gaining a strong voice within the field of literature. In Margaret F. Rosenthal's 1992 study on sixteenth-century Venetian courtesan, she mentions that support from influential male patrons and the ability to pursue self-education had played major roles in promoting Franco's social influence.²³ Another key factor in her success was that she was fortunate enough to live in Venice, the

¹⁹ Doris M. Srinivasan, "Royalty's courtesans and God's mortal wives: keepers of culture in pre-colonial India," in *The Courtesan's Arts: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, ed. Martha Feldman and Bonnie Gordon (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

²⁰ Lisa Nielson, "Visibility and Performance: Courtesans in the Early Islamicate Courts (661–950 CE)," in *Concubines and Courtesans: Women and Slavery in Islamic History*, ed. Matthew S. Gordon and Kathryn A. Hain (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

²¹ Rhonda F. Levine, *Social Class and Stratification: Classic Statements and Theoretical Debates* (Lanham, Md. ; Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998), 52.

²² Margaret F. Rosenthal, *The Honest Courtesan: Veronica Franco, Citizen and Writer in Sixteenth-Century Venice* (University of Chicago Press, 1992); Laura McClure, *Courtesans at Table: Gender and Greek Literary Culture in Athenaeus* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003).

²³ Rosenthal, *The Honest Courtesan: Veronica Franco, Citizen and Writer in Sixteenth-Century Venice*, vii.

publishing capital of Europe at the time.²⁴ Franco's success proves that by self-learning and entering into the influential male social circles, courtesans of low status could also enter the public literary sphere. Another example was the ancient Greek courtesan *hetaeras*. In contrast to the public prostitutes *pornais* who lived in the brothels, high-class *hetaeras* received elite education, were empowered to manage their finances autonomously, and provided long-term intellectual and sexual companionship to famous men.²⁵ Although their career may have been short-lived, *hetaeras* enjoyed a degree of freedom in pursuing this profession and a voice in the society of the time.

Next, let us switch our attention to the courtesan cultures in East Asia. Lesley Downer's 2006 study focuses on Japanese *geisha* (traditional female entertainers and hostesses), who are considered a separate profession from the common courtesans *yūjo* (literary translated as "woman of pleasure"). As artists they have enjoyed high social status but have remained in a paradoxical position on the margins of society: on the one hand, their profession is considered just above prostitution and they are initially from the lower strata of society; on the other hand, *geisha* have been trained to be the companions of the elite, like the ancient Greek *hetaeraes*.²⁶ Meanwhile, Timon Screech's 2006 essay opts to focus on ordinary courtesans living in the "floating world" of Yoshiwara (a red-light district) during Japan's Edo period (1603-1868), illustrating the process by which males entered the enclaves of female entertainers. Screech argues that in the rite of transition from the urban interior to the entertainment district (leaving Edo for Yoshiwara via waterway), male customers shifted their identities, prepared themselves for a moment of transitory pleasures, and re-joined civic life when they returned home the next morning.²⁷ Joshua D. Pilzer focuses on the Korean

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Melissa Hope Ditmore, *Encyclopedia of Prostitution and Sex Work* (Westport, Conn.; London: Greenwood Press, 2006), 37.

²⁶ Lesley Downer, "The City Geisha and Their Role in Modern Japan: Anomaly or Artistes?," in *The Courtesan's Arts: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, ed. Martha Feldman and Bonnie Gordon (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 223-42.

²⁷ Timon Screech, "Going to the Courtesans: Transit to the Pleasure District of Edo Japan," in *The Courtesan's Arts: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, ed. Martha Feldman and Bonnie Gordon (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 255-79.

twentieth-century high-class courtesans, *gisaeng*. Through an exploration of the social transformations of the twentieth century *gisaeng* system, Pilzer outlines the historical conditions under which the *gisaeng* arose. He suggests that the best answer to the question lurking elsewhere in the world of “what happened to the traditional female entertainer” may be to focus on the development of the modern sex industry and the concurrent canonizations of national traditions.²⁸ Susan Lee’s 2010 study focuses on the “talented women” in Chinese, Japanese, and Korean cultures, exploring how this ideal image was constructed in these societies. Taking the theme of romantic pairings between high-class courtesans and their elite male lovers in Chosŏn Korea (1392-1910) and Edo Japan in the art of painting as a case study, Lee points out that the prevailing interpretation paradigm in both Korea and Japan sees genre painting as an “authentic” and unmediated representation of the lives of past national subjects.²⁹

However, the above cases do not speak for the circumstances of the lower status courtesans and prostitutes. Those higher-ranking elite courtesans were at the top of this profession, possessing talents and power that lower-class female entertainers could hardly imagine. In addition, the status of low-class courtesans has often been conflated with sex workers, which has discouraged male clients from openly engaging with them as it could damage their reputations. For example, Lesley Downer’s research states that, although the very low-status Japanese hot-spring courtesans are also trained in dance and music, they are despised by most Japanese (including their peer higher-ranking city *geisha*), because hot-spring courtesans also engage in prostitution for a living, which is considered disgraceful.³⁰ Similar situations have also occurred in post-colonial India. Anna Morcom notes in her 2013 book *Illicit Worlds on Indian Dance: Cultures of Exclusion* that legal restrictions and practical exclusion towards Indian female erotic/public performers have imposed since the late

²⁸ Joshua D. Pilzer, "The Twentieth-Century "Disappearance" of the Gisaeng during the Rise of Korea's Modern Sex-and-Entertainment Industry," in *The Courtesan's Arts: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, ed. Martha Feldman and Bonnie Gordon (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 295-311.

²⁹ Susan Lee, "Korean and Japanese Portraits of Ideal Lovers," in *Asian Literary Voices: From Marginal to Mainstream*, ed. Philip F. Williams (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 13-31.

³⁰ Downer, "The City Geisha and Their Role in Modern Japan: Anomaly or Artistes?," 224.

nineteenth century, due to the ubiquitous conflation of female erotic performers with prostitutes.³¹

In many contexts, the courtesans and clients' interaction has involved a behaviour of exchange, including material and nonmaterial forms, though always laying emphasis on the latter. This reciprocal exchange has blurred the essentially transactional relationship between them, giving rise to an illusion of freedom and equality.³² James N. Davidson argues that by seducing and persuading, and providing services in exchange of presents, the ancient Greek courtesan *hetaera* participated in an economy of gift exchange that maintained rather than separated individuals.³³ Davidson points out that a high-ranking ancient Greek courtesan preferred to receive gifts rather than set payments from the clients, trying to distance herself from the lower-class prostitutes. Lisa Nielson, in her 2017 essay on the performance of pre-modern Islamic music courtesans, also discusses this exchange behaviour of courtesans receiving indirect payment in the form of gifts and favours.³⁴

Such a phenomenon also occurred within the Chinese Ming context. Echoing Davidson's statement, Judith Zeitlin notes that the gift exchange behaviour between the Ming era courtesans and the literati helped to establish a reciprocal relationship and elevated courtesans' status.³⁵ These female entertainers preferred artistic gifts, such as a poem, a painting, or lyrics to a song, although substantial gifts were also expected. They often responded to their clients by composing a matching poem, adding colour to a painting, or singing lyrics on the spot. "All of this contributed to the fantasy of parity between a courtesan and her lover, of favours freely exchanged, and was the sine qua non for romance in the Chinese tradition."³⁶ The Ming period literatus Feng Menglong's short story "The Courtesans

³¹ Anna Morcom, *Illicit Worlds on Indian Dance : Cultures of Exclusion* (London: Hurst, 2013), 73.

³² James Davidson, "Making a Spectacle of Her(self): The Greek Courtesan and the Art of the Present," in *The Courtesan's Arts: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, ed. Martha Feldman and Bonnie Gordon (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 45.

³³ James N. Davidson, *Courtesans & Fishcakes: the Consuming Passions of Classical Athens* (London: HarperCollins, 1997), 118-19.

³⁴ Nielson, "Visibility and Performance: Courtesans in the Early Islamicate Courts (661–950 CE)."

³⁵ Zeitlin, "'Notes of Flesh' and the Courtesan's Song in Seventeenth-Century China," 77.

³⁶ Feldman and Gordon, *The Courtesan's Arts: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, 77.

Mourn Liu the Seventh in the Spring Breeze” is a good example of this two-way interaction and reciprocal gift exchange behaviour, in which courtesans compete to sing lyrics written by the romantic scholar Liu Qi, because interpreting his works will bring them fame and popularity.³⁷

1.2.2 Ming Era Primary Sources

Due to the historical nature of the current study, Ming dynasty primary sources are essential materials, including textual records ranging from novels to literati commentaries, as well as various visual resources, such as woodblock paintings created by contemporaneous artists for novel or drama script illustrations. Works of fiction such as *Jin Ping Mei* 金瓶梅 (The Plum in the Golden Vase) contain great value for this thesis, as it is the first Chinese novel to portray Ming period daily life in detail without recourse to historical stories and folk tales and, fortunately, it includes extensive detailed depictions of courtesans and their involvement in the arts. Crucially, like other late Ming novels, it also provides additional commentary about how the characters’ behaviours embody particular virtues and vices, as envisaged from the perspective of Confucian ideology.³⁸ Other Ming dynasty novels of value to this study include the Qing dynasty literatus Cao Qujing’s 曹去晶 erotic novel *Gou Wang Yan* 姑妄言 (Preposterous Words).³⁹ Some Ming drama scripts are also of positive value to this study, such as *Taohua Shan* 桃花扇 (The Peach Blossom Fan), a *chuanqi* play based on the historical facts of the late Ming dynasty written by the early Qing playwright Kong Shangren 孔尚任 (1648-1718),⁴⁰ and the Ming playwright Tang Xianzu’s 汤显祖 (1550-1616) masterpiece *Mudan Ting* 牡丹亭 (The Peony Pavilion).⁴¹

³⁷ Feng Menglong, *Stories Old and New* 古今小说 [1620], trans. Yang Shuhui and Yang Yunqin, A Ming dynasty collection, (Seattle, London: University of Washington Press, 2000), 207-21.

³⁸ David Tod Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei*, 5 vols., vol. 1-5 (Princeton, New Jersey, and Chichester, West Sussex: Princeton University Press).

³⁹ Cao Qujing, *Gu wang yan shang* 姑妄言 上 [Preposterous words, volume 1] [1730], 3 vols., vol. 1, ed. Xu Xin (Beijing: China Federation of Literary and Art Circles Publishing House, 1999).

⁴⁰ K'ung Shang-Jen, *The Peach Blossom Fan*, trans. Shih-hsiang Chen, Harold Acton, and Cyril Birch (New York: University of California Press, 1976).

⁴¹ Tang Xianzu, *The Peony Pavilion: Mudan Ting*, trans. Cyril Birch, Chinese Literature in Translation,

The trilogy of short stories compiled by the Ming era eminent litterateur Feng Menglong 冯梦龙 (1574-1646), *Gujin Xiaoshuo* 古今小说 (Stories Old and New), *Jingshi Tongyan* 警世通言 (Stories to Caution the World), and *Xingshi Hengyan* 醒世恒言 (Stories to Awaken the World), also contains some descriptions of the Ming period courtesans and female entertainers.⁴² In addition, Feng's collections of Ming era popular songs, *Shan Ge* 山歌 (Mountain Songs) and *Gua Zhi'er* 挂枝儿 (Hanging Branches), are significant primary sources for this study. The songs in these collections were widely popular in the urban areas and brothels of the Suzhou region, and a large number of the lyrics are closely related to the brothel culture and the courtesans' livelihoods.⁴³

Some collections of poetry and song lyrics about courtesans, either written by courtesans or male literati, are crucial references for this thesis. Edited and compiled by a Ming pseudonymous literatus, Wan Yuzi 宛瑜子, *Wu Ji Bai Mei* 吴姬百媚 (Seductive Courtesans of the Suzhou Area) is a book about the courtesan-ranking activities in the Suzhou area, with a wealth of poems, lyrics, and commentaries made on the courtesan-participants.⁴⁴ This book is of vital value for this thesis, as in Chapter 2 about courtesans' repertoire, I categorise and analyse the song lyrics in *Wu Ji Bai Mei* for the first time, based on their poetic forms, the themes of the lyrics, and the emotions therein. Published in 1616, the Ming literary scholars Zhu Yuanliang 朱元亮 and Zhang Mengzhi's 张梦徵 *Qinglou Yunyu* 青楼韵语 (Amorous Words in the Green House) contains more than 500 poems written by around 180 courtesans from the Jin dynasty to the Ming period, making it also highly significant to the present study.⁴⁵

The memoirs, notes, and miscellanies of Ming literati are valuable materials for this

(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980).

⁴² Feng Menglong, *Stories Old and New* 古今小说 [1620]; Feng Menglong, *Stories to Caution the World* 警世通言 [1624]; Feng Menglong, *Stories to Awaken the World* 醒世恒言 [1627].

⁴³ Feng Menglong, *Gua zhi'er shan'ge taixia xinzou* 挂枝儿 山歌 太霞新奏 [Hanging branches, mountain songs, new music of Taixia].

⁴⁴ Wanyuzi, *Wu ji bai mei* 吴姬百媚 [Seductive courtesans of the Suzhou area].

⁴⁵ Zhu Yuanliang and Zhang Mengzhi, *Qinglou yunyu* 青楼韵语 [Amorous words in the green house] (1616) (Beijing: Cultural Relics Publishing House, 2017).

study, as they contain descriptions about Ming era courtesans' musical and cultural life. Perhaps the most crucial for this research is *Banqiao Zaji* 板桥杂记 (Miscellaneous Notes from the Wooden Bridge), which was written by the late Ming and early Qing literati Yu Huai 余怀 (1616-1696) in his later years in order to recollect the amorous affairs and activities that took place in the Nanjing pleasure districts at the end of the Ming dynasty.⁴⁶ *Xian Qing Ou Ji* 闲情偶寄 (Sketches of Idle Pleasures), written by the Qing era scholar Li Yu 李渔 (1611-1680), is a guidebook to the lives and artistic interests of the Ming dynasty, and its expositions on women's charms and songs are of great significance to this study.⁴⁷ Other literati memoirs and notes of positive value to this research include *Tao'an Mengyi* 陶庵梦忆 (Dreaming of Memories in the Tao Study) by Zhang Dai 张岱 (1597- 1679),⁴⁸ *Yingmei'an Yiyu* 影梅庵忆语 (Reminiscences of the Plum Shadows Convent) by Mao Xiang 冒襄 (1611-1693),⁴⁹ and *Wanli Ye Huo Bian* 万历野获编 (A Collection of Unofficial History of Wanli Period) by Shen Defu 沈德符 (1578-1642).⁵⁰

1.2.3 Modern Studies on Ming Courtesanship

Next, it is necessary to review the modern research focusing on the Ming dynasty courtesans. In the past, researchers' own socio-cultural values have made them reluctant to focus on and evaluate the activities of these low-status entertainers. In recent years, however, there has been an upsurge of research in reassessing the life experiences and artistic practice

⁴⁶ Yu Huai, "Miscellaneous Records of the Plank Bridge 板桥杂记 [1693]," in *Plum Shadows and Plank Bridge: Two Memoirs About Courtesans* (New York Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 2020).

⁴⁷ Li Yu, *Xian qing ou ji* 闲情偶寄 [Sketches of idle pleasures] [1671], 2 vols., vol. 1, ed. Du Shuying (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2014).

⁴⁸ Zhang Dai, *Tao an meng yi xi hu meng xun* 陶庵梦忆 西湖梦寻 [Dreaming of memories in the Tao study; searching for dreams at the West Lake] (1775; 1671) (Changsha: Hunan Yuelu Publishing House).

⁴⁹ Mao Xiang, "Reminiscences of the Plum Shadows Convent 影梅庵忆语 [1651]," in *Plum Shadows and Plank Bridge: Two Memoirs About Courtesans* (New York Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 2020).

⁵⁰ Shen Defu, *Wanli ye huo bian* 万历野获编 [A collection of unofficial histories of the Wanli period], Selected historical notes of Yuan and Ming dynasties, (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1959).

of the Ming period courtesans. A large proportion of the studies focus on the courtesans' literary achievements and the unique role they played in the traditionally male-dominated literary arena. Dorothy Ko's 1994 book *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China* was one of the first publications to systematically investigate women's literary achievements in the Late Ming period. Ko explores the poetry and artistic cultivation of courtesans who lived far away from the gentry families, the Ming period women's transitory and mobile social identities (including courtesans, gentry wives, and concubines), as well as friendships between courtesans and upper-class elite women.⁵¹ The 1997 book *Writing Women in Late Imperial China*, edited by Ellen Widmer and Kang-i Sun Chang, includes a series of essays reassessing Chinese women writers of the late imperial period (1600-1900).⁵² Among these studies, Paul S. Ropp's essay explores how courtesans and their culture were depicted in poetry in the late imperial period.⁵³ Li Wai-Yee's paper delves into how and why courtesans became a projection of the cultural ideals of the late-Ming literati.⁵⁴ Ōki Yasushi's article focuses on the images of women in Feng Menglong's *Shan'ge* (a type of popular song prevalent in entertainment venues and urban areas), where a large proportion of the women depicted are courtesans and low-status prostitutes.⁵⁵

Li Xiaorong's 2006 doctoral thesis explores the unique ways in which artistically talented women of the Ming and Qing dynasties, including courtesans, composed poetry. She illustrates how these women poets understood the inner chambers as a distinctive textual territory, imbued with their subjective perspectives and experiences.⁵⁶ Xu Sufeng's 2007

⁵¹ Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1994).

⁵² Ellen Widmer and Kang-i Sun Chang, *Writing Women in Late Imperial China* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 1997).

⁵³ Paul S. Ropp, "Ambiguous Images of Courtesan Culture in Late Imperial China," in *Writing Women in Late Imperial China*, ed. Ellen Widmer and Kang-i Sun Chang (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 1997).

⁵⁴ Wai-yee Li, "The Late Ming Courtesan: Invention of a Cultural Ideal," in *Writing Women in Late Imperial China*, ed. Ellen Widmer and Kang-i Sun Chang (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 46-73.

⁵⁵ Yasushi Ōki, "Women in Feng Menglong's Mountain Songs," in *Writing Women in Late Imperial China*, ed. Ellen Widmer and Kang-i Sun Chang (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

⁵⁶ Xiaorong Li, "Rewriting the inner chambers: the boudoir in Ming-Qing women's poetry" (PhD diss. McGill University, 2006).

doctoral dissertation examines the rise of the late Ming literary courtesan and their relationship with the male literati community, proposing that late Ming courtesan culture was a counter-culture: although deeply rooted in patriarchal male literati societies, its promoters valued romantic relationships while devaluing the most basic interpersonal relationships as defined by Confucianism, thus fundamentally undermining orthodox values.⁵⁷ Daria Berg's 2013 book *Women and the Literary World in Early Modern China, 1580-1700* focuses on the rise of literary women in the late Ming and early Qing dynasties and the relationships between women and the literary world. Taking the famous courtesan Xue Susu as a case study, the book's third chapter explores contemporaneous perceptions of courtesans and their worlds, as well as the self-fashioning and cultural representations of these women.⁵⁸ Berg's 2009 article reviews, in particular, the artistic achievements of Xue Susu. She compellingly argues that Xue's poetry expresses her inner voice, calls for social and intellectual equality with male literati, and reflects fads and fantasies in the literati realm.⁵⁹ Berg proposes that, although those famous courtesans of the Ming dynasty were engaged in different artistic fields, they were all engaged in a self-shaping activity, characterized by a yearning for self-realization without being restricted by the fashion and values of male literati.⁶⁰

Modern research about Ming courtesans also focuses on their artistic achievements, the courtesans' image in contemporaneous literature, their relationships with the literati community, and the courtesans' position within the socio-cultural milieu of the time. In Van Gulik's 1974 masterpiece on sex life in China, where he delves into the nuanced differences between various types of female entertainers and their roles in society, Gulik incisively points out that brothel culture had a huge influence on the cultural and artistic fields of the Ming era Jiangnan area.⁶¹ Tseng Yuho states in her 1993 article on female painters in the Ming-era that

⁵⁷ Sufeng Xu, "Lotus Flowers Rising from the Dark Mud: Late Ming Courtesans and Their Poetry" (PhD diss. McGill University, 2007).

⁵⁸ Daria Berg, *Women and the Literary World in Early Modern China, 1580-1700* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 85-118.

⁵⁹ Daria Berg, "Cultural Discourse on Xue Susu, a Courtesan in Late Ming China," *International Journal of Asian Studies* 6, no. 2 (2009): 195.

⁶⁰ Berg, "Cultural Discourse on Xue Susu, a Courtesan in Late Ming China," 254.

⁶¹ R. H. Van Gulik, *Sexual life in ancient China: A Preliminary Survey of Chinese Sex and Society from ca. 1500*

the cultivation of a high-level courtesan requires professional training in vocal music, dance, art, and literature.⁶² In her 1994 work on women and culture in seventeenth century China, Dorothy Ko expounds the conflicts inherent in the status of Ming courtesans in elite society: they were able to receive systematic training in art and literature, which was not open to the daughters from the commoner class.⁶³ Hsu Pi-Ching's 2000 study focuses on the idealised courtesans in Feng Menglong's literary works, examining the interplay of morality and culture in the courtesan-literatus romantic narrative and exploring the literati's perceptions of the Self and the Other.⁶⁴ Jean Wetzel's 2002 article explores the courtesans' role as agents of communication in the late Ming urban world of arts and visual culture.⁶⁵ Harriet T. Zurndorfer's 2011 study explores the social status of the Ming era prostitutes and courtesans and reveals the socio-economic conditions that drove women into prostitution.⁶⁶ Monica Merlin's 2013 PhD thesis focuses specifically on the personal lives and artworks of Ma Shouzhen, a famous Ming dynasty Nanjing courtesan, reassessing her artistic accomplishments in painting, poetry, and theatre practice.⁶⁷ Through the lens of gender relations, Beverly Jo Bossler's 2013 book *Courtesans, Concubines, and the Cult of Female Fidelity: Gender and Social Change in China, 1000-1400* examines the places of three different capacities of women (wives, concubines, prostitutes) in society and family lives as well as the historical development of their positions.⁶⁸ Based on historical sources, Mi Zhao's

B.C. till 1644 A.D., ed. Paul R. Goldin, Sinica Leidensia, (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2003), 308-11.

⁶² Yuho Tseng, "Women Painters of the Ming Dynasty," *Artibus Asiae* 53, no. 1/2 (1993): 250, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.2307/3250517>.

⁶³ Dorothy Ko, "Transitory Communities: Courtesan, Wife, and Professional Artist," in *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1994), 256.

⁶⁴ Pi-Ching Hsu, "Courtesans and Scholars in the Writings of Feng Menglong: Transcending Status and Gender," *Nan Nü* 2, no. 1 (2000).

⁶⁵ Jean Wetzel, "Hidden Connections: Courtesans in the Art World of the Ming Dynasty," *Women's Studies* 31, no. 5 (2002), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/00497870214051>.

⁶⁶ Harriet T. Zurndorfer, "Prostitutes and Courtesans in the Confucian Moral Universe of Late Ming China (1550-1644)," *International Review of Social History* 56, no. S19 (2011), www.jstor.org/stable/44583212.

⁶⁷ Monica Merlin, "The Late Ming Courtesan Ma Shouzhen (1548-1604): Visual Culture, Gender and Self-Fashioning in the Nanjing Pleasure Quarter" (PhD diss. University of Oxford, 2013).

⁶⁸ Beverly Bossler, *Courtesans, Concubines, and the Cult of Female Fidelity: Gender and Social Change in China, 1000-1400*, Harvard-yenching institute monograph series, (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center,

2017 article focuses on the romantic story of the courtesan Ma Xianglan and her literati lover Wang Zhideng, exploring how this romance worked as a vehicle for late-Ming culture and commercial networking.⁶⁹

In recent years, scholars have endeavoured to recoup the Ming courtesans' musical attainments, paying particular attention to their vocal arts and song-making. Judith T. Zeitlin shows a keen interest in these female artists' song production. Her 2006 article explores the intertwined eroticism and singing in the courtesans' arts, the latter being figuratively referred to by the literati as "notes of flesh."⁷⁰ In her 2008 article, Zeitlin explores the gift exchange of songs in the relationship between the courtesans and the literati – usually manifested as the literati composing lyrics and giving them to the courtesan, who would render a performance in return. This exchange was a commonplace means of cultural production in Ming courtesanship.⁷¹ Zeitlin's 2013 study concerns the verbal and pictorial representations of songs in the late Ming courtesans' singing culture, and the concepts of love and music that these representations render.⁷² Peng Xu's 2014 PhD thesis examines how singing made a tangible impact on the everyday lives of people and theatrical performances in the late Ming period. She pays special attention to the training process of male music teachers for their courtesan students, the different modes of singing and their distinctive aesthetics.⁷³ Xu's 2014 article explores the gendering of courtesans' singing styles and their relation to some specific sonic environments in the thriving singing culture of the late Ming period.⁷⁴ In her 2016 article, Xu draws attention to the late Ming music teacher community, which has received little scholarly focus. She argues that the singing tutors – whose student body

2013).

⁶⁹ Mi Zhao, "Ma Xianglan and Wang Zhideng Onstage and Offstage: Rethinking the Romance of a Courtesan Theatre in Ming-Qing China," *Asian Theatre Journal* 34, no. 1 (2017).

⁷⁰ Zeitlin, "'Notes of Flesh' and the Courtesan's Song in Seventeenth-Century China."

⁷¹ Judith T. Zeitlin, "The Gift of Song: Courtesans and Patrons in Late Ming and Early Qing Cultural Production," in *Hsiang Lectures on Chinese Poetry, Vol. 4* (Centre for East Asian Research, McGill University, 2008).

⁷² Judith T Zeitlin, "The Pleasures of Print: Illustrated Songbooks from the Late Ming Courtesan World," in *Gender in Chinese Music* (2013), 41-65.

⁷³ Peng Xu, "Lost Sound: Singing, Theatre, and Aesthetics in Late Ming China, 1547-1644" (PhD diss. University of Chicago, 2014).

⁷⁴ Peng Xu, "Courtesan vs. Literatus: Gendered Soundscapes and Aesthetics in Late-Ming Singing Culture," *T'oung Pao* 100, no. 4-5 (2014).

consisted primarily of courtesans and female entertainers living in both entertainment venues and wealthy households – played a key role in the development of the erotic singing styles that became an integral part of the late-Ming singing aesthetics.⁷⁵

In Chinese academia, there are likewise many scholars who have paid close attention to Ming era courtesan culture. Mao Wenfang's 2001 book, *Objects, Gender, Observation: A New Exploration of Cultural Narratives from the Late Ming to Early Qing Dynasties*, explores cultural writing in the late Ming and early Qing dynasties through the lens of gender studies. In particular, Chapter 4 discusses the objectified women in the courtesan ranking activities and the self-awareness achieved by courtesans in their literary creation.⁷⁶ Cheng Huihui's 2007 doctoral thesis, *A Study of the Qinhuai Music Register*, explores the evolution of the music register system in the Qinhuai area of Nanjing since the Ming dynasty and the role of women's music and private courtesans in the inheritance of urban music.⁷⁷ Liu Shiyi's 2013 doctoral dissertation *Brothel, Romance and Literati Literature: Brothel Culture and Literature in Ming Dynasty* traces the historical origins of the female prostitute culture, explores a range of topics including the literati's selection of courtesans, the brothel literature, and the relationship between scholars and courtesans.⁷⁸ In the fourth chapter of Wang Xueping's 2019 book, *A Study of the Ming Handmaiden Group*, she focuses on the talented handmaidens (or household courtesans, as I would argue), which she categorises into four types: singing maids, dancing maids, female musicians, and literary maids. Wang argues that, despite the fact that the handmaiden group was at the lower stratum of the Ming social class, talented handmaidens were often favoured by their masters and led privileged lives.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Peng Xu, "The Music Teacher: The Professionalization of Singing and the Development of Erotic Vocal Style During Late Ming China," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 75, no. 2 (December 2016).

⁷⁶ Mao Wenfang, *Wu xingbie guankan ming mo qing chu wenhua shuxie xintan* 物·性别·观看——明末清初文化书写新探 [Objects, gender, observation: a new exploration of cultural narratives from the late Ming to early Qing dynasties] (Taipei: Taiwan Student Book Company, 2001), 36-52.

⁷⁷ Cheng Huihui, "Qinhuai yueji yanjiu 秦淮乐籍研究 [A study of the qinhuai music register]" (PhD diss. China Academy of Art, 2007).

⁷⁸ Liu Shiyi, "Xiaxie qingyu yu wenren fengsao 狭邪、情欲与文人风骚: 明代青楼文化与文学 [Brothel, romance, and literati literature: brothel culture and literature in Ming dynasty]" (PhD diss. Nankai University, 2013).

⁷⁹ Wang Xueping, *Mingdai binü qunti yanjiu* 明代婢女群体研究 [Research on Ming dynasty maidservants]

However, there are still gaps needing to be filled in this academic field. I find that there is very little modern study that focuses specifically on the Ming era courtesans' music making, the transmission and embodiment of emotions in their music, and the courtship strategies they employed when interacting with the clients. Now, it is timely to reassess the influence and contribution that those courtesans made in the field of music and bring to light their relevance as a focus for study, situating my work at the point of disciplinary intersection between historical ethnomusicology, Chinese cultural studies, courtesanship studies, and Chinese literature studies.

1.3 Key Definitions

Before reviewing the Ming era historical background, it is necessary to elucidate some key definitions relating to this topic.

- *Ji* 妓 (courtesan)

In the context of Ming period Chinese society, there is an extensive lexicon denoting female entertainers and artists who provided a myriad of services, including *ji* 伎/妓 (courtesans), *chang* 娼 (low-status prostitutes), *yueji* 乐妓 (musical courtesans), and *genü* 歌女 (singing girls). Of these, *ji* 妓 was the most prevalently used term referring to a broad spectrum of female entertainers who offered various entertainments, companionship, and sexual services. This spectrum ranged from lower-status common prostitutes to the distinguished courtesans, known as *mingji* 名妓 (which I will delve into later). These nouns are often used interchangeably in Chinese contexts, and the boundaries between their definitions tend to be nebulous.⁸⁰ I translate these female entertainer-artists as “courtesans”, aligning with their common perception in English contexts.

(Beijing: People's Publishing House, 2019), 102-34.

⁸⁰ Ropp, "Ambiguous Images of Courtesan Culture in Late Imperial China," 18-19.

- *Jiaofang si* 教坊司 (Imperial Music Office)

The Ming Imperial Music Office was a governmental institution in charge of ritual, music, and dance, and was first established in the Tang dynasty. It not only undertook the choreography and performance of court music and dance, but also took charge of the music households (*yuehu* 乐户) in the two capitals, Nanjing and Beijing.⁸¹

- *Yueji* 乐籍, or *yuehu* 乐户 (Music Household)

The *yueji* 乐籍 (Music Registry), or *yuehu* 乐户 (Music Household), was a product of the Ming period registration system. During the Ming period, all households had to be registered in an official census and, in the agriculture-oriented ancient Chinese society, merchants, labourers, musicians and slaves (商、工、乐、隶) were all categorised as low status *jianji* 贱籍 (Lowly-Status Registry). Because of their inability to contribute substantially towards the economy, people recorded in the Music Registry were of low status, and were mostly made up of slaves, criminals and their dependents, with their status usually inherited from generation to generation. By the Ming dynasty, the Music Registry people's status had become further degraded. In the early years of the Yongle period (1403-1424), the wives and daughters of guilty officials were even relegated to the Imperial Music Office (*jiaofang si* 教坊司), where they were punished by having to provide musical entertainment and sexual services to soldiers and officers.⁸² Female entertainers who were registered in the Music Household were known as official courtesans. Because of their lowly status, these women were not allowed to intermarry with people outside the Music Household, such as soldiers, farmers, and merchants, unless they were deregistered from their original household. The Ming literatus Yu Huai's *Miscellaneous Records of the Plank Bridge* notes that,

⁸¹ Liu Shiyi, "Jiaofang, zhonggu si, yuehu yu qinglou 教坊、钟鼓司、乐户与青楼 [Imperial music office, bells and drums office, music households, and brothels]," *Chuanshan xuekan* 船山学刊 1 (2012): 158-59.

⁸² Liu, "Jiaofang, zhonggu si, yuehu yu qinglou 教坊、钟鼓司、乐户与青楼 [Imperial music office, bells and drums office, music households, and brothels]," 159.

“[courtesans’] entering into marriages and removing their names from the Music Registry was the province of the Bureau of Rituals. 从良落籍，属于祠部。”⁸³

- *Qinglou* 青楼 (brothel)

There are broad and narrow definitions of *qinglou* 青楼 (brothel). In the broad sense, it refers to all prostitution-based institutions, including licensed brothels and private courtesan houses. In a narrower sense, *qinglou* refers to the officially operated, licensed courtesan houses in the two Ming dynasty capitals – Nanjing and Beijing – which were run and managed by the Music Household, and catered for providing services for people from various classes, including officials, scholars, peasants, and merchants.⁸⁴ In this study, the term *qinglou* (brothel) refers to the broader sense of courtesan house that operated entertainment activities, where courtesans offered a wide range of services to clients.

There is a range of Chinese terms that refer to Ming period entertainment venues offering drinks and food, musical performances, companionship and conversations with women, and sex: *qinglou* 青楼 (literally “green house”, referring to brothels), *xingyuan* 行院 (brothels, or places where drama was performed), *quzhong* 曲中 (brothel, where *qu* literally means “song”), and *jiuyuan* 旧院 (literally “Old Courtyard”, referring to the courtesan quarters in Nanjing city). In addition to these establishments, courtesans and prostitutes also worked in lavish boats called *hua fang* 画舫 (painted boats).

The Old Courtyard was located on the banks of the Qinhuai River in Nanjing, not far from where the imperial examinations were held, so as to be able to serve the scholars who came to take examinations:

旧院与贡院遥对，仅隔一河，原为才子佳人而设。逢秋风桂子之年，四方应试者毕集，结驷连骑，选色征歌，转车子之喉，按阳阿之舞，院本之笙歌合奏，迴舟之一水皆香。

⁸³ Yu Huai, "Miscellaneous Records of the Plank Bridge 板桥杂记 [1693]," 76. Translated by Li Wai-ye.

⁸⁴ Liu, "Jiaofang, zhonggu si, yuehu yu qinglou 教坊、钟鼓司、乐户与青楼 [Imperial music office, bells and drums office, music households, and brothels]," 161.

The Old Quarters and the Examination Quarters faced each other across the distance, separated only by the river. The setting was from the beginning meant for talented scholars and beauties. When it came to the year of the triennial examination, examination candidates from the four corners of the realm all gathered there in the season of autumn breezes and cassia blossoms. Traveling in groups, they chose among beauties and sought out the best songs. Exquisite singers trilled their notes and marvellous dancers swirled rhythmically. When the music from pipes and singing voices of opera rose together in unison, fragrance would pervade the water as the boats turned around.⁸⁵ [Li Wai-yee translation]

- *Baomu* 鸨母 (procuress)

In addition to the courtesans, another important figure in the brothel was the *baomu* 鸨母 (procuress), whose relationship with the courtesans is worth discussing. The *baomu*, or *jiamu* 假母, often translated as madam, [false] mother, or procuress, worked as the upper manager of the courtesan group. A *baomu* could be the biological mother of a courtesan (as the term suggests), or she could be of no blood relation to the courtesan, in which case she could be referred to as a “false mother”. As mentioned in *Miscellaneous Records of the Plank Bridge*, a *baomu*'s attitude towards a courtesan depended on whether or not she was her birth mother: for a biological daughter, “good patrons who came their way were allowed to tarry for as long as they wanted — money would not become an issue. If they refused to consort with vulgar men or rich merchants, their mothers would not be angry with them. 遇有佳客，任其留连，不计钱钞，其侗父大贾，拒绝弗与通，亦不怒也。”⁸⁶ However, for courtesans who were not related by blood, *baomu* would demand high prices from the clients.

⁸⁵ Yu Huai, "Miscellaneous Records of the Plank Bridge 板桥杂记 [1693]," 76.

⁸⁶ Yu Huai, "Miscellaneous Records of the Plank Bridge 板桥杂记 [1693]," 76. Translated by Li Wai-yee.

1.4 Historical Background

The middle and late Ming dynasty was a period that witnessed a booming economy and the emergence of new ideological trends. Trade activities flourished as products such as tea, spices and silk began to be exported to the Middle East, Europe, and other places.⁸⁷ Moreover, the monetization of silver and the increase of population mobility hollowed out the traditional rural-centred local society, causing the urban population to soar.⁸⁸ The economic growth stimulated the developments of commerce, manufacturing, and a population aggregation in cities, which then fuelled a culture of lavish consumption among urban dwellers.⁸⁹

This study mainly focuses on courtesan culture in the Jiangnan region during the late Ming period. Jiangnan broadly denotes the southern part of the lower reaches of the Yangtze River. However, there is no geographically unified definition of Jiangnan in academia. According to the modern scholar Xu Maoming, the geographical scope of Ming era Jiangnan included the eight regions of Suzhou, Songjiang, Changzhou, Hangzhou, Jiaying, Huzhou, and Taicang.⁹⁰ Nevertheless, Gao Yifan argues that Jiangnan, as historically recognised by the Ming people, actually included only the four regions of Suzhou, Songjiang, Changzhou and Zhenjiang.⁹¹ In this study, I mainly address the heartland Jiangnan province, Jiangsu, with a special focus on the Nanjing and Suzhou cities (see below, Figure 1.1).⁹² These regions were characterised by well-developed economies and thriving entertainment

⁸⁷ Victoria Baldwin Cass, *Dangerous Women: Warriors, Grannies, and Geishas of the Ming* (Lanham, Md. ; Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), 1.

⁸⁸ Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China*, 35-37.

⁸⁹ Timothy Brook, *The Troubled Empire: China in the Yuan and Ming Dynasties* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2010), 112-13. Si-yen Fei, *Negotiating Urban Space: Urbanization and Late Ming Nanjing* (Cambridge, Mass. ; London: Harvard University Asia Center, 2009), 12; 224.

⁹⁰ Xu Maoming, *Jiangnan shisheng yu Jiangnan shehui* 江南士绅与江南社会 (1368-1911 年) [Jiangnan gentry and Jiangnan society, 1368-1911] (Beijing: The Commercial Press, 2006), 12-13.

⁹¹ Gao Yifan, "Mingdai guanfang wenshu zhong de jiangnan 明代官方文书中的“江南” [“Jiangnan” in Ming era official documents], *Jiangsu shehui kexue* 江苏社会科学 2 (2017): 260.

⁹² Martino Martini, "Nanjing or Jiangnan, 9th Province of the Chinese Empire," in *The 1655 Novus Atlas Sinensis*, ed. Willem Jansz Blaeu and Joan Blaeu (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, 1655).

cultures.⁹³ In addition, my research has revealed that these two areas yielded a relatively large and rich body of historical materials about courtesans.



Figure 1.1: A map of Jiangnan (Kiangnan) area in 1655 (early Qing dynasty). “Kiangning” is the Ming era Nanjing, and “Sucheu” is the Ming era Suzhou.

From Martino Martini’s (1614-1661) “Nanjing or Jiangnan, 9th Province of the Chinese Empire”, in *The 1655 Novus Atlas Sinensis*.

⁹³ Xu, *Jiangnan shisheng yu Jiangnan shehui* 江南士绅与江南社会 (1368-1911 年) [Jiangnan gentry and Jiangnan society, 1368-1911], 12-13.

The prosperity of courtesan culture in this period was bounded up with the prosperity of the contemporary publishing industry. The Jiangnan region was not only home to some of the most famous pleasure quarters but was also a centre of publishing. The literati editors in the early seventeenth century published a large number of books about the courtesans' realm, much of the content of which was lyrics of popular songs and independent arias from the entertainment venues.⁹⁴ The rapid development of the publishing industry in the Ming dynasty allowed a large number of anecdotes, novels, and illustrations depicting banquet scenes in pleasure quarters to be published and circulated among the citizens, providing ample and reliable primary sources for later scholars to study courtesan-ship in Ming era China. The pursuit and enjoyment of luxury and entertainment in urban life during the mid to late Ming dynasty provided a nearly perfect soil for courtesan culture, prompting it to reach the peak of prosperity.⁹⁵

I argue that the deeper reasons for the change of Ming era people's attitudes towards art, cultural life, and sex, lie in the birth of commodity economy capitalism, the rise of a civic class, and changes in people's aesthetic value-orientation. In the middle and late Ming dynasties, along with the popularity of Wang Yangming's 王阳明 advocacy of Philosophy of Mind 心学, the literati represented by Li Zhi 李贽 (1527-1602), Tang Xianzu 汤显祖 (1550-1616), and Feng Menglong began to proclaim the importance of *qing* 情 (emotion, feeling) and *zhen* 真 (genuineness, authenticity) in the ideological and aesthetic circles; the literati class gradually revealed their pursuit of individual liberation and self-worth.⁹⁶ The concept of "*qing* as priority" emphasized and valued secular emotions, claiming that the "true feelings between men and women" was the cornerstone of almost all social relations.⁹⁷ Such

⁹⁴ Zeitlin, "The Gift of Song: Courtesans and Patrons in Late Ming and Early Qing Cultural Production," 18.

⁹⁵ Ko, "Transitory Communities: Courtesan, Wife, and Professional Artist," 293. Also see: Zurndorfer, "Prostitutes and Courtesans in the Confucian Moral Universe of Late Ming China (1550-1644)," 199-200.

⁹⁶ Wang Tan and Zhang Pengzhen, "Feng Menglong Shan'ge zhong yunhan de zhuqing sixiang zhi guankui 冯梦龙《山歌》中蕴含的'主情'思想之管窥 [A peek into Feng Menglong's thoughts about 'qing' contained in 'mountain songs']," *Minzu yilin* 民族艺林 01 (2020): 88. Zurndorfer, "Prostitutes and Courtesans in the Confucian Moral Universe of Late Ming China (1550-1644)," 208-13.

⁹⁷ Feng Jialin, "Feng Menglong qingjiao sixiang yu sanyan bianzhan 冯梦龙'情教'思想与'三言'编撰 [Feng Menglong's thoughts about 'love' and the 'sanyan' compilation]," *Wenyi pinglun* 文艺评论 4 (2015): 32. Chu Zhuyan, "Cong xiaoshuo yu xiqu de bijiao shijiao kan Feng Menglong de qingjiao sixiang 从小说与戏曲的比

canonization of “true feeling” 真情 made some literati abandon the old conventions of classical literature that originally occupied the mainstream, and instead positively cultivate popular literature and art rooted in civic culture, represented by novels, drama scripts, and vernacular folk songs, for they were considered more emotionally authentic.⁹⁸ A typical example is Feng Menglong’s praise and active promotion of erotic folk songs that were widely popular in pleasure venues (represented by songbooks *Gua Zhi’er* and *Shan’ge*).⁹⁹ Moreover, in *Qinglou Yunyu* 青楼韵语 (Amorous Words in the Green House), Zhu Yuanliang 朱元亮 affirmed the human yearning for love and desire and considered the demand for affective feelings between clients and courtesans to be equal in the entertainment arena:

男女虽异，爱欲则同。……客与妓，非居室之男女也。而情则同，女以色胜，男以俊俏伶俐胜，自相贪慕。¹⁰⁰

Although men and women are different, they share the same love and desire... The clients and the courtesans, they are not husbands and wives living together. Yet their affective emotions are the same, (only) the women prevail in their beauty, and the men in their handsomeness and wit, and they lust after each other.

In short, the entertainment arena in which the courtesans lived provided a fertile space for the growth of popular culture, which the literati prized as full of genuine emotion.

The lines between the different classes of Chinese courtesan are blurred and there is almost no distinguishing difference in their nature of work. Low-ranking courtesans did essentially work as prostitutes and sold sexual favours, but they were trained in performing arts as well, typically vocal singing and stringed instrument playing (*pipa* and *zheng*). Higher-

较视角看冯梦龙的“情教”思想 [On Feng Menglong’s ‘cult of emotion’ from the comparative perspective of novels and dramas], *Zhongnan minzu daxue xuebao* 中南民族大学学报 34 (2014): 152.

⁹⁸ Ōki, "Women in Feng Menglong’s Mountain Songs," 138-39.

⁹⁹ Xu, "The Music Teacher: The Professionalization of Singing and the Development of Erotic Vocal Style During Late Ming China," 287.

¹⁰⁰ Zhu Yuanliang and Zhang Mengzhi, *Qinglou yunyu* 青楼韵语 [Amorous words in the green house], 37.

ranking courtesans were expected to be artistically more refined, specializing in various high arts including poetry-writing, painting, and even *guqin* playing, yet they were also available for the provision of sex.¹⁰¹ In addition, singing was one of the most crucial components of their work. Judith Zeitlin has noted that *ji* is translated as “singing girls” in many English translations of Chinese literature because the services provided by a *ji* usually involved singing.¹⁰² Similarly, I have observed that, in many Ming sources, low-status women entertainers who provided singing services are called *chang de* 唱的 (literally, “the singing”) and have thus naturally been translated as “singing girls” by many translators. The current study focuses on the Ming period entertainers who possessed artistic skills, ranging from the lowliest ranking, almost historically unrecorded common prostitutes to the most famous courtesans, as the services they offered were by no means confined to boudoir pleasures.

Although there are no significant differences in the nature of their work, I have broadly classified the different ranks and types of Ming era entertaining and performing women into the following categories (based on social status, activities, place of work, and social connections): renowned courtesans, common courtesans, and domestic courtesans.

As Dorothy Ko points out, the Chinese term closest to the meaning of the word “courtesan” in the English context is the term *mingji* 名妓 (literally, famous prostitute, or renowned courtesan).¹⁰³ Most of the famous courtesans stood out from the ordinary courtesans by their distinctive attributes (talents or physical appearances). They had close ties with the literati, and thus had considerable social influence. In the late Ming period, when courtesan culture was extremely prosperous, people even exalted eight outstanding courtesans on the banks of the Qinhuai River in Nanjing as the “Eight Beauties of the Qinhuai River” 秦淮八艳, who were Ma Xianglan, Bian Yujing, Li Xiangjun, Li Ruyun, Dong Xiaowan, Gu Hengbo, Kou Baimen, and Chen Yuanyuan. Many literati referred to the deeds of renowned courtesans of the time in their memoirs, novels, and poems. For example, the writer Zhang

¹⁰¹ Cheng Huihui, "Yueji jiji huaji zhi bianxi 乐籍, 妓籍, 花籍之辨析 [Analysis of music households, prostitute households and flower households]," *Yinyue yanjiu* 音乐研究 2 (2007): 24.

¹⁰² Zeitlin, "‘Notes of Flesh’ and the Courtesan’s Song in Seventeenth-Century China," 76.

¹⁰³ Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China*, 253-55.

Dai recorded a biography of the courtesan Wang Yuesheng in his book *Tao'an Mengyi* 陶庵梦忆 (Dreaming of Memories in the Tao Study), which is a record of late Ming social life.¹⁰⁴ Yu Huai's book *Banqiao Zaji* 板桥杂记 (Miscellaneous Records of the Plank Bridge), which reports on the brothel district in the late Ming Qinhuai area, documents the biographies of more than a dozen courtesans including Gu Hengbo, Dong Xiaowan, Bian Yujing, Li Xiangjun, Kou Baimen, and Ma Xianglan.¹⁰⁵ In his *Yingmei'an Yiyu* 影梅庵忆语 (Reminiscences of the Plum Shadows Convent), Mao Xiang traces the course of his relationship with the courtesan Dong Xiaowan (who later became his concubine), from their acquaintance to her illness and death.¹⁰⁶ Famous courtesans were expected to be proficient in a range of skills favoured by their patrons (literati or merchants), such as painting, calligraphy, *guzhen* playing, and *weiqi* playing, and had to be exceptionally well-mannered and charming in order to excel in the extremely competitive entertainment arena. Famous courtesans lived in official brothels or had their own residence. They were able to exercise more choice in their lives than ordinary courtesans and prostitutes.

When I use the term “common courtesans”, I am referring to the ordinary female entertainers who were enrolled in the Music Register and who were engaged in the entertainment industry. They worked and lived in licensed or unlicensed brothels.

In addition, there was a type of female entertainer kept in private households, known as a “domestic courtesan” (家妓 *jiaji*).¹⁰⁷ Domestic courtesans, likewise, belonged to the Music Registry, being trained from an early age in a range of musical skills such as stringed instrument playing and singing. They were primarily responsible for entertainment functions in the domestic sphere, providing music and dance performances for family members and guests invited by the owner, but were still obliged to carry out housework and other chores. Such permeability into private spheres was not unique to Ming female entertainers. In fact, as

¹⁰⁴ Zhang Dai, *Tao'an meng yi xi hu meng xun* 陶庵梦忆 西湖梦寻 [Dreaming of memories in the Tao study; searching for dreams at the West Lake].

¹⁰⁵ Yu Huai, "Miscellaneous Records of the Plank Bridge 板桥杂记 [1693]".

¹⁰⁶ Mao Xiang, "Reminiscences of the Plum Shadows Convent 影梅庵忆语 [1651]".

¹⁰⁷ For a more detailed explanation about “domestic courtesan”, see: Wang Shu-nu, *Zhongguo changji shi* 中国娼妓史 [The history of prostitution in China] (Beijing: Unity Press, 2004), 158-65.

early as the Southern Song (1127-1279), the fashion of raising household courtesans with various skills had been popular among literati society.¹⁰⁸ All courtesans and prostitutes, regardless of their ranks, belonged to the Music Registry. Ultimately, they were all low-class people engaged in various types of performance including instrumental music playing, singing, dancing, and drama performance.

Courtesans typically entered the profession either through lineage, being born into a Music Household family and naturally continuing the family profession, or through human trade. This trade usually manifested in two ways: first, the wives, concubines, and daughters of destitute families who had lost their male heads of household were sold to brothels; second, the wives and daughters of criminals were assigned to the Music Household, and consequently began work in the profession. These women often worked in pleasure quarters until a client was willing to pay a ransom to free them from the Music Household. This usually meant entering into marriage. However, even if courtesans found someone willing to pay such a price, they often became the concubines of these men. Some courtesans, after many years in the profession, would semi-retire. They might continue to practice the courtesan profession while also conduct teaching, or they might become full-time educators. These teachers covered a range of subjects, including music, etiquette, and drama performance, training young girls in brothels. For instance, the monologue of the female protagonist in the Yuan period drama script “Du Rui-niang wisely received her reward at the Golden Thread Pond” 杜蕊娘智赏金线池 proves that courtesans would perform teaching duties in addition to their own work:

¹⁰⁸ Beverly Bossler, "Shifting Identities: Courtesans and Literati in Song China," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 62, no. 1 (2002): 5-37. Beverly Bossler, "Floating Sleeves, Willow Waists, and Dreams of Spring: Entertainment and Its Enemies in Song History and Historiography," in *Senses of the City: Perceptions of Hangzhou and Southern Song China, 1127–1279*, ed. Joseph S. C. Lam et al. (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2017), 5.

闻得母亲说，他是烂黄齏，如今又缠上一个粉头，道强似我的多哩！这话我也不信。我想，这济南府教坊中人，那一个不是我手下教道过的小妮子？料必没有强似我的……¹⁰⁹

I heard my mother say that he's as bad as a rotten pickle, but I didn't realise that that he's now messing around with another woman, who's much better than me! I don't believe it though. I wonder, among the courtesans of Ji-nan Prefecture Pleasure Quarters, which one of them has not been coached by me? I'm sure none of them can compete with me.

In addition to retired former courtesans, male music masters also worked as teachers of courtesans. The Ming era painter and poet Gu Zhengyi's 顾正谊 painting "An Ode to Singing" 咏歌 is very likely a visual representation revealing a musical training scene (Figure 1.2).

¹⁰⁹ Guan Hanqing, *Guan Hanqing xiqu ji* 关汉卿戏曲集 [A collection of Guan Hanqing's operas] (Beijing: China Drama Press, 1958), 809.



Figure 1.2: *Yong ge* 咏歌 “An Ode to Singing”. From Gu Zhengyi 顾正谊 *Bai Yong Tu Pu* 百咏图谱 [Pictorial Catalogue of A Hundred Odes on Things], Hanji 汉籍 [Chinese books], Yamaguchi University Library.¹¹⁰

Despite Judith Zeitlin’s view that the men in the painting may be clients,¹¹¹ I argue that the two men, or at least the bearded man in the centre of the picture, could very likely be music teachers of the two courtesans. My deduction is based on the painting’s overall composition: The two men and two women sit facing each other in a garden. While one of the women sits on a rock and holds a fan (while possibly singing, judging by the title of the painting), the other woman sits on a stool with her head bowed down, blowing a *xiao* flute. And, while the man sitting on the left watches on in a modest manner, the bearded man seems

¹¹⁰ Gu Zhengyi, *Bai yong tu pu* 百咏图谱 [Pictorial catalogue of a hundred odes on things], 1598, Hanji 汉籍 [Chinese books], 133, Yamaguchi University Library, <https://knowledge.lib.yamaguchi-u.ac.jp/rb/17>.

¹¹¹ Zeitlin, "The Pleasures of Print: Illustrated Songbooks from the Late Ming Courtesan World," 44.

to be earnestly scrutinizing the women's activities, with a distinct air of authority. Significantly, this bearded man also has his left hand extended, positioned as though beating to the music. Thus, I argue that there is a high likelihood of him being the women's music teacher.

Interestingly, a similar scenario is presented in an excerpt from *Nanzhong Fansheng Tu* 南中繁盛图 (Painting of the Prosperity of Central South) – see Figure 3 (below). In this scene, two men and two women sit facing each other in an indoor setting, with one of the two women playing the *xiao* and the other playing the *pipa*. The man who is facing us extends his right hand, which holds a folded fan, and also appears to be beating time to the women's musical performance.



Figure 1.3: *Nanzhong Fansheng Tu* 南中繁盛图 [Painting of the Prosperity of Central South]. Exhibition of Ancient Chinese Costume Culture. National Museum of China, Beijing.¹¹²

¹¹² *Nanzhong fansheng tu* 南中繁盛图 [Painting of the prosperity of central South], Ming Dynasty, Exhibition of Ancient Chinese Costume Culture, National Museum of China, Beijing.

The clientele of the Ming courtesans were mainly the literati and the newly emerging merchant community, with the former having a profound influence on the development of courtesan culture.¹¹³ In Chinese society, which has attached great importance to literary accomplishment since ancient times, the right of speech has always been held by the literati. It is argued by Kam Louie in his work about Chinese masculinity that after Confucianism became the mainstream religion of China, literary accomplishments, rather than military prowess, became the most highly valued attribute amongst the ruling class.¹¹⁴ As a result, intellectuals were highly sought-after for their potential political power. The power of political discourse enjoyed by the literati promoted a bilateral interaction between the courtesans and the scholars: not only did the literati groups take delight in interacting with female entertainers for companionship and literary inspiration, but also the courtesans were willing to accompany the literati to enhance their reputation.

Some Ming Courtesans enjoyed an unprecedented high social status and reputation, largely due to their strong connections with the gentry-literati class. This argument has been repeatedly presented by many scholars. Van Gulik points out that Ming gentry-literati, writers and artists frequented the pleasure quarters in the Qinhuai River region of Jiangnan.¹¹⁵ Hsu Pi-Ching proposes that the romantic narrative of the unrecognised scholars and the faithful courtesans became popular in the Ming dynasty because frustrated scholars in the highly competitive and unfair civil service examinations sought to transcend their marginal status (shared with courtesans) and achieve self-worth in literature.¹¹⁶ Jean Wetzel (2002) argues that the high status enjoyed by courtesans in Ming urban society was due to their positive depiction in popular literature and the visual arts, where sometimes they were ironically presented as models of virtue.¹¹⁷ In sharp contrast to the prosperity of the Ming was the

¹¹³ Zeitlin, "'Notes of Flesh' and the Courtesan's Song in Seventeenth-Century China," 75.

¹¹⁴ Kam Louie, *Theorising Chinese Masculinity : Society and Gender in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 11.

¹¹⁵ Gulik, *Sexual life in ancient China: A Preliminary Survey of Chinese Sex and Society from ca. 1500 B.C. till 1644 A.D.*, 308-11.

¹¹⁶ Hsu, "Courtesans and Scholars in the Writings of Feng Menglong: Transcending Status and Gender," 76-77.

¹¹⁷ Wetzel, "Hidden Connections: Courtesans in the Art World of the Ming Dynasty," 659.

negative attitude towards courtesans in the Qing dynasty. Susan Mann (1997) claims that due to the revival of classicism, they became increasingly marginalized in Qing elite society, being replaced by the culture of *guixiu* 闺秀 – literature and art created by women from elite families.¹¹⁸ Paul S. Ropp (1997) notes that courtesans' positive images dwindled in written records after the early eighteenth century (early Qing era), after which they were more often associated with gloomy and negative images.¹¹⁹ However, the courtesans' special status put them on the fringes of the traditional family-unit society. Dorothy Ko (1994) asserts that the status of Ming courtesans was fluid enabling them to permeate domestic realms, becoming concubines through marriage, or private performers.¹²⁰

1.5 Dissertation Structure: Summary

Immediately following this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 begins by revisiting the Ming courtesans' repertoire, focusing especially on the two song genres that they most commonly sang: *sanqu* (stand-alone songs) and *xiaoqu* (popular songs). I then present a comprehensive study of the songbook and poetry anthology *Wu Ji Bai Mei* 吴姬百媚 (Seductive Courtesans of the Suzhou Area), elucidating the various poetic structures employed, themes addressed, and emotions conveyed. Here, I reveal this anthology to be a remarkably valuable resource, shedding much light on Ming courtesan culture.

Chapter 3 extends my analysis into the performance domain. I begin by investigating the developments and stylistic differences between the two primary styles of the period: southern and northern *qu*. I also examine how and why “pure singing” (清唱 *qingchang*) became so fashionable, in which the focus is always firmly on the voice, with only minimal accompaniment. Here, I argue that the popularity was driven not only by the opera master Wei Liangfu's innovations to southern *qu*, but also by the fact that such singing was well suited to

¹¹⁸ Susan Mann, *Precious Records: Women in China's Long Eighteenth Century* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997), 121-42.

¹¹⁹ Ropp, "Ambiguous Images of Courtesan Culture in Late Imperial China," 18.

¹²⁰ Ko, "Transitory Communities: Courtesan, Wife, and Professional Artist," 251-93. Also see Wetzels, "Hidden Connections: Courtesans in the Art World of the Ming Dynasty," 664.

the courtesans' performance contexts. Next, in this same chapter, I systematically investigate the range of contexts that the courtesans performed in, categorising them according to scale and openness, and also considering the types of interaction that prevailed in each.

In Chapter 4, I shift the focus onto the emotional dimension, revisiting the multiple ways in which the central concept of “*qing*” (emotion) has been interpreted, and assessing the Ming literati's ideal of “genuine emotions” (真情 *zhenqing*). Addressing a large selection of courtesan-related song texts from the period, I apply the standard categorisation (commonly advanced in the field of Music Psychology) of there being five basic emotions in music: love, joy, sadness, anxiousness, and anger. I also analyse the songs' contents in terms of what I term “a natural progression of love”, comprised of six stages: first encounter, unrequited love, falling in and being in love, obstacles and separation, longing and waiting, and complaining and resenting. Finally, I consider the significance of establishing empathy during the courtesans' performances and explore several other rarely considered emotion-related phenomena: peak experience, visual imagery, and episodic memory.

Next, Chapter 5 concentrates on a single very well-known Ming era novel: *Jin Ping Mei* 金瓶梅 (The Plum in the Golden Vase) – pinpointing and analysing the various sounds alluded to in the novel and represented as having characterised the sonic environments where the courtesans lived and worked. Here, I apply a soundscape studies perspective, revealing the rich and varied symbolic meanings attached to diverse bird calls, animal noises, weather sounds, and human-made sounds (musical and otherwise), and I argue that the novel itself is a strong testimony to the Ming literati's recognition and pursuit of “*qing*”. The characters in the novel (and the novelist himself) are keen to portray themselves as true connoisseurs of emotion – hyper-sensitive to the nuanced meanings conveyed in sounds, music, and other sensory stimuli.

Finally, Chapter 6 turns the analytical focus upon the courtesans' art of seduction, which evidently lay at the core of their profession. Applying theories and findings from courtship and behavioural studies in combination with a close reading of Ming period sources, this chapter identifies the various seductive strategies that the courtesans commonly employed, as depicted in both textual and visual representations. Here, I chart the processes involved in relation to four main stages: attention catching, interacting and developing intimacy, lovemaking, and after passion.

In short, as emphasised in the title itself, the current dissertation focuses on three keywords in the field of Ming courtesanship: songs, sentiments, and seduction. Through my study, I seek to reveal how these three elements interacted with each other and were embedded in the realms of pleasure where these female entertainers lived and worked.

2. The Ming Courtesans' Repertoire

In order to understand the Ming courtesans' music-making practices, it is necessary first to understand the popular music genres that prevailed during the Ming dynasty – all of which were performed by them. I have categorized the main music types in their repertoire into three categories: *xiaoqu* 小曲 (little-scale song/ditty), *sanqu* 散曲 (“scattered song”, or stand-alone song), and various kinds of *xiqu* 戏曲 (opera, led by *kunqu* opera 昆曲 and *chuanqi* opera 传奇). While considering all of these, this chapter focuses especially on the first two types, *xiaoqu* and *sanqu*, due to their frequent mentioning in sources concerning the Ming era courtesans' repertoire. The purpose of this chapter is to reconstruct the repertoire of the Ming courtesans and delineate the distinctions between the various styles of music they performed.

The character *qu* 曲 occurs in all of these genre names, translating as “song” or “music” in English. All *qu* forms could involve the externalisation of verses through singing, but could also be experienced through reading, or as “closet drama” in certain cases.¹²¹ According to the *Encyclopaedia of China*, broadly speaking, *qu* refers to verses of poetry that can be sung or performed, dating back to the Qin dynasty (221–207 B.C.), including *daqu* (large-scale songs)¹²² during the Han (202–220 B.C.) to Tang dynasties (618–907 A.D.), and popular ditties from various periods.¹²³ In a narrower sense, *qu* refers to the northern and southern opera style songs that developed from the Song dynasty (960–1279 A.D.).¹²⁴

The Ming era literatus Wang Shizhen 王世贞 (1526-1590) explicitly related *qu* to *ci* 词 (words or lyrics) — a poetic form that peaked during the Song dynasty — and characterised its setting as follows:

¹²¹ Closet drama (案头戏 *antou xi*) usually refers to drama scripts suited more for reading than performing, emphasizing literary value and the pleasure of reading. Yang Dongfu and Liang Yang, "Zhongguo sanqu shi 中国散曲史 [The history of Chinese sanqu]," *Yuedu yu xiezuo 阅读与写作* 1 (1994): 26.

¹²² *Daqu* is a large-scale musical performance integrating singing, instrument playing, and dance. Che Xilun and Liu Xiaojing, "Xiaochang kao '小唱' 考 [On discussion of xiaochang]," *Zhonghua xiqu 中华戏曲*, no. 1 (2007): 158.

¹²³ "Zhongguo da baike quanshu 中国大百科全书 [Encyclopedia of China]," in *Encyclopedia of China* (2nd, Beijing: Encyclopedia of China Publishing House, 2016).

¹²⁴ *Zhongguo quxue da cidian 中国曲学大辞典* [Dictionary of Chinese qu study], ed. Qi Senhua, Chen Duo, and Ye Changhai (Zhejiang: Zhejiang Education press, 1997), 1. For a more detailed explanation of the southern and northern *qu*, see Chapter 3.

曲者词之变。自金、元入主中国，所用胡乐，嘈杂凄紧，缓急之间，词不能按，乃更为新声以媚之。¹²⁵

Qu is a type of *ci*. Ever since the Jin and Yuan dynasties ruled over China, it has been characterised by a loud, desolate, and fast-paced foreign musical setting, where the verses do not match the music's tempo. This has necessitated the development of a new form.

Here, Wang's exposition suggests that this "new form" of *qu* was northern *sanqu*, to be discussed further below.

Amongst the Yuan and Ming dynasty literati, *ci* and *qu* were evidently often regarded as homologous, as is amply demonstrated by the interchangeable use of these terms in written records – specifically in relation to tune names and literary genre labels.¹²⁶ For example, the Ming era military commander, musician, and playwright Zhu Quan's 朱权 treatise *Taihe Zhengyin Pu* 太和正音谱 (Taihe Correct Tone Musical Notation) repeatedly refers to the 187 focal Yuan period poets as composers of "*ci*":

马东篱之词，如朝阳鸣凤，其词典雅清丽……张小山之词，如瑶天笙鹤。其词清而且丽，华而不艳。……诚词林之宗匠也。¹²⁷

Ma Dongli's *ci* are akin to the melodious phoenix song at dawn, characterized by its elegant and refined beauty... Similarly, the *ci* composed by Zhang Xiaoshan can be likened to the celestial music of the *sheng* (Chinese mouthorgan) accompanied by the graceful dance of cranes. His *ci* are lucid and beautiful, splendid yet not ostentatious... Truly, they are the master craftsmen of the *ci* genre.

¹²⁵ Wang Shizhen, "Qu zao 曲藻 (Wang's comments on qu)," in *Xin quyuan* 新曲苑 [A new anthology of songs], ed. Ren Zhongmin (Nanjing: Phoenix Publishing House, 2014), 83.

¹²⁶ Yang Dongfu and Liang Yang, "Zhongguo sanqu shi 中国散曲史 [The history of Chinese sanqu]," *Yuedu yu xiezuo* 阅读与写作 1 (1994): 27-28.

¹²⁷ Zhu Quan, *Taihe zhengyin pu jian ping* 太和正音谱笺评 [Commentary on the Taihe correct tone musical notation], trans. Yao Pingwen (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2010).

Meanwhile, closely aligned to the terms *ci* and *qu* is the term *yuefu* 乐府 (literally, “music bureau”), though the latter more particularly denotes poetry composed in a folk song style. Many *qu* collections from the period feature “*yuefu*” as a suffix to their names, such as the Ming period works *Chengzhai Yuefu* 诚斋乐府 (A Music Collection from the Chengzhai Studio) by Zhu Youdun 朱有墩 and *Xiaoshuang Zhai Yuefu* 萧爽斋乐府 (A Music Collection from the Xiaoshuang Studio) by Jin Luan 金銮.¹²⁸

Now that the close relationship between *qu* and *ci* has been acknowledged, next I will elucidate the various types of *qu* that the Ming period courtesans focused their attentions on, categorizing them broadly as *sanqu* and *xiaoqu*, and clarifying their differences in musical style and historical origins.

2.1 Stand-Alone Songs: *Sanqu*

Sanqu (literally, “scattered song”, or stand-alone song) is a particular form of *qu*. Unlike opera performance, a typical *sanqu* performance lays its emphasis exclusively on singing, without spoken parts (*bingbai* 宾白), makeup and detailed dramatic enactment.¹²⁹ As a literary genre, *sanqu* is akin to *ci* poetry: it similarly involves setting text within a pre-established structure, with set tonal patterns, metric templates, and rhyme schemes. However, *sanqu* differs from *ci* by affording the writer greater flexibility to deviate from fixed models and incorporate so-called “padding characters” (*chenzi* 衬字, words inserted in a line of verse for balancing the structure or for euphony). Moreover, while *sanqu* maintains an elegance of poetic style, it also incorporates a substantial amount of vernacular language, seamlessly blending the refined and the demotic. The subtle differences in the syntactic structures and writing styles of *ci* and *sanqu* are illustrated by the following examples. The first is a *ci* poem written by the northern Song era female poet Li Qingzhao 李清照 (1084-1155):

¹²⁸ Zhu Youdun, *Chengzhai yuefu* 诚斋乐府 [A music collection from the Chengzhai studio]; Luan Jin, *Xiaoshuang zhai yuefu* 萧爽斋乐府 [A music collection from the Xiaoshuang studio].

¹²⁹ *Zhongguo quxue da cidian* 中国曲学大辞典 [Dictionary of Chinese qu study], 4.

(Ci) 点绛唇

蹴罢秋千，起来慵整纤纤手。露浓花瘦，薄汗轻衣透。

见客入来，袜划金钗溜。和羞走，倚门回首，却把青梅嗅。¹³⁰

[To the tune] Painting Crimson Lips

Leaving the swing, she lazily straightens her delicate hands.

The dew is heavy and the flowers are wilted,

Thin sweat dampens her light clothing.

Seeing a guest arriving,

She leaves in a hurry, wearing only her socks, and

A gold hairpin slips from her hair.

Blushing, she walks away, leaning on the door and turning her head,

And then she smells the green plums.

This poem exemplifies the refined style of *ci* poetry, adhering to established syntactic structures without the need for padding words to adjust syllables or convey moods.

Conversely, the following examples are three *sanqu* pieces composed by the Ming dynasty playwright Zhu Youduan (1379-1439). These pieces exhibit a more playful tone and extensive vernacular language, while adding padding words to adjust sentence structures, reflecting the genre's emphasis on singability. The first example is a southern *sanqu* admonishing young people to avoid lingering in brothels:

(*Sanqu*) 南曲 柳摇金 · 再戒漂荡

诚心相劝，衷肠尽言，休恋恶姻缘。笑里藏锋刃，绵中安套圈。(一觉地)青蚨

亏欠，薄嬷苦熬煎。(道)调猯酿狙，¹³¹ 须凭是钱。婊娟怨你，你怨婊娟；你怨婊娟，惭愧怎重相见。¹³²

¹³⁰ Li Qingzhao, *Li Qingzhao ji jiaozhu* 李清照集校注 [The collected works of Li Qingzhao], 83.

¹³¹ The original characters are rich in semantic meaning. The second and fourth characters incorporate the radical 犭, which is associated with animals, subtly signalling that prostitutes are being seen as almost sub-human. Meanwhile, the character *dan* 狙, which I have translated as “courtesan”, literary means “drama actress”, highlighting the close connection between these two professions.

¹³² Zhu Youdun, *Chengzhai yuefu* 诚斋乐府 [A music collection from the Chengzhai studio], 38.

[To the southern tune] The Swaying Golden Willows

[Title] A Further Warning Against Drifting

With heartfelt sincerity, I fully advise you to eschew deleterious unions.

Hidden within her laughter is a blade, and nestled in her softness is a snare.

(Finally you will) find yourself in debt,

Suffering at the hands of the brothel's madam.

(Remember,) dalliances with prostitutes and courtesans come at a price.

The beauty blames you, and you in turn blame her.

You blame her, how can you face each other without shame?

Here, the sentence pattern and the number of characters adhere to the tune “The Swaying Golden Willows”, comprising twelve sentences in total. This fixed pattern facilitates the identification of padding characters, which I have marked in blue for reference. Notably, the repetition and interplay of “you” and “the beauty” towards the *sanqu*'s conclusion serve as a simple yet effective play on words. The next example further illustrates the frequent application of padding words in *sanqu* composition:

(*Sanqu*) 殿前欢 · 咏酒色财气

您须知, (好时光休要) 皱双眉。有花有酒同欢会, 满饮金杯。酒淹 (的) 衫袖湿, (醉了呵) 鼾鼾睡, 醒来 (也) 重还醉。喫了穿了, 快活 (是) 便宜。¹³³

[To the tune] Joy in Front of the Palace

[Title] Ode to Wine, Beauty, Wealth, and Prestige

You must know, (when the good times roll, don't) furrow your brow.

With flowers and wine, let's rejoice and toast with golden cups filled.

Our sleeves dampened by wine (are) wet,

(Once we're drunk) we snore in slumber, and

upon waking, we're (still) drunkenly blissful.

While we are eating and dressing well, happiness (indeed) comes cheap.

¹³³ Zhu Youdun, *Chengzhai yuefu* 诚斋乐府 [A music collection from the Chengzhai studio], 65-66.

Regarding *sanqu*'s developmental trajectory, the genre was evidently influenced by other literary and art styles besides *ci*, including the Song period narrative form *zhugong diao* 诸宫调, the *zhuanqi* 赚词 opera-style set songs popular in the Song and Jin dynasties, and *daqu* 大曲 (“grand song”, a series of songs often used as accompaniment to dance performances).¹³⁴

The Ming dynasty's highly developed commodity economy and relatively permissive social atmosphere significantly increased the demand for creative entertainment forms. *Sanqu* catered well to this demand because, unlike opera or drama, *sanqu* performances were not constrained by external conditions such as space, accompanying instruments, or costumes. Its structure was short, and its performance form was straightforward, devoid of dialogue and acting, and focusing solely on singing. Hence, *sanqu* is sometimes also referred to as *qingqu* 清曲 (pure song) in sources from the period – in addition to simply “*qu*”, “*ci*” and “*yuefu*”, as mentioned earlier in this chapter. In fact, the term “*sanqu*” only begins appearing in print with the Ming literatus Zhu Youdun's 朱有墩 book *Chengzhai Yuefu* 诚斋乐府.¹³⁵ Nevertheless, the term has subsequently become favoured within academic circles and, for the sake of consistency, I collectively refer to this kind of independent, short-structured, singable verse literature as *sanqu*.

Many scholars assert that *sanqu* reached its artistic peak during the Yuan dynasty, while the Ming *sanqu*, although greater in quantity, are inferior in terms of craftsmanship and ingenuity in the treatment of subject matter.¹³⁶ Conversely, some argue that Ming *sanqu* holds

¹³⁴ Yang Dongfu and Liang Yang, "Zhongguo sanqu shi 中国散曲史 [The history of Chinese sanqu]," 22-23.

¹³⁵ Zhu Youdun, *Chengzhai yuefu* 诚斋乐府 [A music collection from Chengzhai studio].

¹³⁶ Zhao Yishan, "Ming sanqu shi yanjiu 明散曲史研究 [A study of the history of non-dramatic songs in the Ming dynasty]" (PhD diss. Sichuan University, 2004), 3. The Ming scholar-dramatist Li Kaixian 李开先 remarked, “*Ci* originated in the Jin and peaked in the Yuan. 词肇于金而盛于元.” Here, the term “*ci*” is almost certainly a reference to *sanqu*. He further opined that *sanqu* should be evaluated “using those of the Jin and Yuan dynasties as benchmarks, akin to how one considers the Tang dynasty poetry as the pinnacle. 以金元为准, 犹诗之以唐为极也.” While Li did not overtly criticize the Ming *sanqu*, his preferential inclination towards Yuan *sanqu* over its Ming counterparts is palpable. Contemporary scholars, including Tian Shouzhen and Li Changji, echo the sentiment that Ming *sanqu* trails behind Yuan *sanqu* in artistic calibre. Tian pinpointed inadequacies in artistic achievement and in the treatment of predominant themes, specifically “lamenting the secular world” and “sentimentality”. Meanwhile, Li posited that the overarching trend in Ming *sanqu* development was a “return” to Yuan conventions, offering minimal ground-breaking contributions. See: Tian Shouzhen, "yuan ming sanqu bijiao 元明散曲比较 [A comparison of Yuan and Ming sanqu]," *Sichuang shifan daxue xuebao* 四川师范大学学报 3 (1978): 49-61; Li Changji, *Zhongguo gudai sanqu shi* 中国古代散曲史 [The history of ancient Chinese

its ground when compared to Yuan *sanqu*, emphasizing the former's unique strength in assimilating elements from folk songs.¹³⁷ On this basis, Luo Jintang even posits that “the Ming dynasty represented the second golden age of *sanqu*”,¹³⁸ thereby rectifying the standing of Ming *sanqu* in historical and cultural discourse. Meanwhile, most contemporary scholars stress that the *sanqu* from the Yuan and Ming periods each exhibit distinct characteristics, and that it is unnecessary to debate the supremacy of one era over the other. In the early twentieth century, the writer Lu Qian reflected on this, stating:

元以后有明曲，犹唐以后有宋诗，明承元曲之遗而变之，亦犹宋承唐诗之遗而变之；孰谓唐后便无诗，元后便无曲邪？¹³⁹

After the Yuan dynasty there were Ming *qu*, just as there were Song *ci* after the Tang poetry. The Ming *qu* inherited and transformed the legacy of Yuan *qu*, paralleling how the Song *ci* inherited the traditions of the Tang poetry and built upon it. How can one claim that poetry ceased to exist after Tang, or that *qu* disappeared post-Yuan?

2.2 Popular Songs: *Xiaoqu*

As another subcategory of *qu*, *xiaoqu* can be literally translated as “small song” or “small ditty”. According to the *Dictionary of Chinese Qu Study*, *xiaoqu* typically refers to folk songs and popular tunes prevalent during the Ming and Qing dynasties. The lyrics are usually straightforward, unambiguous, and easy to comprehend.¹⁴⁰ The “small” in its name does not pertain to the length of its structure, but rather to its relatively simple – and, crucially, low

sanqu] (East China Normal University Press, 1991), 356.

¹³⁷ Yang and Liang, “Zhongguo sanqu shi 中国散曲史 [The history of Chinese sanqu],” 24.

¹³⁸ Luo Jintang, *Zhongguo sanqu shi 中国散曲史 [The history of Chinese sanqu]* (Taipei: Taiwan Chinese Culture Press, 1956).

¹³⁹ Lu Qian, *Sanqu shi 散曲史 [The history of sanqu]* (Chengdu: Chengdu University, 1930). Section 3, page 1.

¹⁴⁰ *Zhongguo quxue da cidian 中国曲学大辞典 [Dictionary of Chinese qu study]*, 5.

status – structure and content. In order to comprehend the definition of *xiaoqu* in the Ming period, one must first consider the interpretations of earlier periods. The term has been in literary circulation since the Southern Qi dynasty (479-502 A.D.), although it was initially used specifically in reference to dance music.¹⁴¹

It was not until the Song dynasty that the term's meaning shifted to denote songs with relatively simple musical structure and short, strongly vernacular texts. For example, in the Song era book *Yi Jian Zhi* 夷坚志 (Records of Broad-mindedness and Persistence) — a collection of mystery novels — *xiaoqu* are depicted as being flexibly interspersed among the courtesans' narrative verse performances, and, crucially, as being songs well-suited for the expression of deeply personal sentiments:

有歌诸宫调女子洪惠英，正唱词，次忽停鼓白曰：“惠英有述怀小曲，愿容举似。“乃歌曰：“梅似雪，刚被雪来相挫折。……”¹⁴²

A female performer named Hong Huiying was performing *Zhugong Diao*.¹⁴³ She was singing the verses, but then suddenly, she stopped playing the drum and reciting the words, saying, “I have a *xiaoqu* that can express my state of mind. Please let me perform it.” She then sang, “The plum is like snow; it has just been thwarted by snow...”

The Song dynasty's definition of *xiaoqu* evidently continued into the Yuan era. For example, in Tao Zongyi's *Chuo Geng Ji* 辍耕记 (Records of Returning from the Farm), he mentions *xiaoqu*'s role in the relationships between officials and courtesans, as gifts and expressions of affection:

¹⁴¹ “Dance music, all comprising ancient and elegant sounds, extolling and stating merits and virtues, is played at feasts... There are over ten *xiaoqu*, which are called dance music, though I doubt they would be used as banquet songs. Nonetheless, this is how dance music has traditionally been named. 舞曲，皆古辞雅音，称述功德，宴享所奏。……如此十馀小曲，名为舞曲，疑非宴乐之辞。然舞曲总名起此矣。” From: Xiao Zixian, *Nan qi shu* 南齐书 [Book of the Southern Qi] (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1972), 191.

¹⁴² Hong Mai, *Yi jian zhi* 夷坚志, vol. 21, *Biji xiaoshuo daguan* 笔记小说大观 [A grand view on notes and novels], (Taipei: 新兴书局 Book Store Co., LTD, 1986), 2020.

¹⁴³ *Zhugong Diao* is a kind of Chinese literature of narrative verse that appeared in the Northern Song dynasty.

歌儿珠帘秀，姓朱氏，姿容姝丽，杂剧当今独步。胡紫山宣慰极钟爱之，尝拟《沈醉东风》小曲以赠云：“锦织江边翠竹，绒穿海上明珠。...”¹⁴⁴

The singing courtesan Lianxiu, surnamed Zhu [meaning “pearls”], is unrivalled in today’s opera circles for her beautiful looks and postures. The official Hu Zishan has declared his passionate love for her and has attempted to compose a *xiaoqu* “Drunk in the East Wind” as a gift for her: “The green bamboo by the river is woven on the brocade, the pearl on the sea is threaded with silk...”

Zeitlin’s 2008 article explores the reciprocity of “songs as gifts” in the relationships between courtesans and clients, and this practice of gift exchange is also discussed in Chapter 1’s literature review and in Chapter 3 of this thesis.¹⁴⁵

By the Ming dynasty, the definition of *xiaoqu* had shifted somewhat, coming to focus on short simple songs with explicit associations to the styles popular amongst the masses.¹⁴⁶ The development of Ming *xiaoqu* greatly benefited from the prosperity of the commodity economy and the handicraft industry. Since the mid-Ming dynasty, capitalism had begun to develop vigorously in China, promoting mass migration from rural areas into the growing urban centres.¹⁴⁷ As a result, rural folk song culture began to infiltrate urban lives, where musicians and performers – including courtesans, of course – appropriated and adapted their defining features into their own artistry, forging a wealth of *xiaoqu*. These songs were extensively circulated and greatly favoured by many in the literati circles.¹⁴⁸

In the Ming era, *xiaoqu* were also referred to by various other names, including *suqu* 俗曲 (vernacular song), *liqu* 俚曲 (rustic song, or unembellished song), *shijin xiaoling* 市井小令 (street small song), *shidiao* 时调 (songs of the time, or, fashionable tunes), *geyao*

¹⁴⁴ Tao Zongyi, *Chuo Geng Ji* 辍耕记 [Records of returning from the farm], vol. 7, Biji xiaoshuo daguan 笔记小说大观 [A grand view on notes and novels], (Taipei: 新兴书局 Universal Book Company, 1986), 566.

¹⁴⁵ Zeitlin, "The Gift of Song: Courtesans and Patrons in Late Ming and Early Qing Cultural Production."

¹⁴⁶ *Zhongguo quxue da cidian* 中国曲学大辞典 [Dictionary of Chinese qu study], 5.

¹⁴⁷ Liu Zaisheng, *Zhongguo gudai yinyue shi jianshu* 中国古代音乐史简述 [A brief history of ancient Chinese music] (Beijing: People's Music Publishing House, 1980), 370.

¹⁴⁸ Yang Yinliu, *Zhongguo gudai yinyue shigao* 中国古代音乐史稿 [Historical manuscripts of ancient Chinese music], 2 vols., vol. 1 (Beijing: People's Music Publishing House, 1981), 746.

歌谣 (folk song), *min'ge* 民歌 (folk song), *shan'ge* 山歌 (mountain song), and so on.¹⁴⁹

In this study, all of these are collectively referred to as *xiaoqu*, while acknowledging that there are subtle differences between their connotations, as indicated for example by Wang Jide's 王骥德 (1540-1623) classification of "mountain song" as a sub-category of *xiaoqu*:

...南之滥流而为吴之「山歌」，越之「采茶」诸小曲，不啻郑声，然各有其致。¹⁵⁰

... *Xiaoqu* are widespread in the South, including "mountain songs" in the Wu region and "tea picking songs" in the Yue region. They are not dissimilar from the indulgent vocal styles of the Zheng region, but each possesses its unique style and temperament.

In the unofficial history notes and opera treatises of the Ming dynasty, many literati commented on the contemporary popularity of *xiaoqu*. Some also referred to *Da Zao Gan* 打枣竿 (The Jujube Beating Rod), denoting either a famous northern ditty bearing that name or a specific collection of folk songs:¹⁵¹

北人尚余天巧，今所流传打枣竿诸小曲，有妙人神品者。南人苦学之，决不能入。盖北之打枣竿，与吴人之山歌，不必文士，皆北里之侠，或闺间之秀，以无意得之。犹诗中郑卫诸风，修大雅者反不能作也。¹⁵²

Northerners still possess a natural knack, as seen today in widespread popular ditties like "The Jujube Beating Rod", some of which are of exquisite and divine quality. Southerners can strive and study all they want, but they will never be able to grasp it. This is because "The Jujube Beating Rod" of the North, much like the "Mountain Songs" of the Wu people, are not necessarily composed by literati. Rather, they are the

¹⁴⁹ *Zhongguo quxue da cidian* 中国曲学大辞典 [Dictionary of Chinese qu study], 5.

¹⁵⁰ Wang Jide, *Qulü zhushi* 曲律注释 [Notes on the rules of qu] [1624], 21.

¹⁵¹ See also: Cui Xiaoxi, "Mingdai min'ge shuping 明代民歌述评 [A Review of Ming folk songs]," *Minsu yanjiu* 民俗研究 2 (1997).

¹⁵² Wang Jide, *Qulü zhushi* 曲律注释 [Notes on the rules of qu] [1624], 20-21.

works of gallant figures from the northern alleys,¹⁵³ or works composed in boudoirs, attained without deliberate intention. Just as in poetry, where the styles of Zheng and Wei prevail,¹⁵⁴ those who attempt to cultivate grand elegance often find themselves incapable of creating it.

.....

歌谣词曲，自古有之...凡朋辈谐谑，及府县士夫举措，稍有乖张，即缀成歌谣之类，传播人口...而里中恶少燕闲，必群唱银绞丝、干荷叶、打枣竿，竟不知此风从何而起也。¹⁵⁵

Folk songs, *ci*, and *qu*, have existed since ancient times, but in recent years they have become very common. Any witty banter among friends or actions of officials and scholars that are slightly unconventional, will immediately be written into folk songs and spread among the people. In the alleys, the mischievous youngsters and idle folk often gather to sing “Silver Skein Twisting”, “Dried Lotus Leaves”, and “The Jujube Beating Rod”, not even realizing where this trend originated from.

Some scholars even assert that it was *xiaoqu*, rather than *sanqu*, that stood out as the period’s most invaluable art form. For instance, the Ming dramatist Zhuo Renyue 卓人月 expressed his reverence for popular songs from the Wu region (referring to *xiaoqu*, given the context):

我明诗让唐，词让宋，曲又让元，庶几吴歌《挂枝儿》、《罗江怨》、《打枣竿》、《银绞丝》之类，为我明一绝耳。¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³ *Beili* 北里 (northern alleys) refers to brothel districts. So, the “gallant figures” here refers to courtesans or people who frequented brothels.

¹⁵⁴ During the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period (BC770 – BC221), the music of the states of Zheng and Wei was considered to be synonymous with extravagance and debauchery.

¹⁵⁵ See the “Customs 风俗” article in: Fan Lian, *Yunjian jumu chao* 云间据目抄 [A copy of Yunjian records] (Nanjing: Guangling Engraving Association of Ancient Books, 1984).

¹⁵⁶ *Xuxiu siku quanshu* 续修四库全书 [Continuing to revise the complete library in the four branches of literature], 1800 vols., vol. 1314 (Shanghai: Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House, 2002), 700.

In our Ming dynasty, the poetry is not as good as that of the Tang dynasty, *ci* is not as good as that of the Song dynasty, and *qu* is not as good as that of the Yuan dynasty. But, fortunately, there are songs from the Wu area, such as “Hanging Branches”, “Resentment in River Luo”, “The Jujube Beating Rod”, and “Silver Skein Twisting”, which are exquisite.

The examples provided above demonstrate that certain *xiaoqu* were widely cherished across diverse Ming period social strata. Furthermore, we can discern the following defining characteristics of *xiaoqu*: its roots in the lives of the lower echelons of society; its trajectory from rural districts to urban centres; its reliance on oral dissemination; its frequent incorporation of current affairs as thematic material; and the considerable creative freedom it afforded. These attributes contributed to *xiaoqu*'s status as one of the most beloved music genres in the middle and late Ming dynasty.

Additionally, *xiaoqu* was widely lauded by Ming literati for its perceived “genuineness” (*zhen* 真). In He Yuming's 2003 treatise on performance space and text during the late Ming dynasty, she delves into the prevalence and dissemination of popular songs within private performance realms, astutely noting that the obscenity often found in *xiaoqu* was a reflection of the societal ethos prevalent in private performance spaces.¹⁵⁷

In Ming era written accounts, *xiaoqu* are frequently mentioned alongside *sanqu*, so it is imperative to delineate the connections and distinctions between them. It is evident that *sanqu* and *xiaoqu* were closely interrelated during the Ming period. While both were short-form songs, the former were significantly influenced by the newly abundant *xiaoqu*. As Zhou Yubo posits, once these popular tunes had been appropriated and refined by the literati, their cruder elements were minimized, and the style of delivery was altered to align with their preferred forms and styles. Nevertheless, the connections to rural origins remained evident in the literati's continued use of *qupai* 曲牌 (tune name, or melodic pattern name), such as “The Pockmarked Woman” 麻婆子, “Flowers on the Wall” 墙头话, “Rolling Hydrangea” 滚绣

¹⁵⁷ He Yuming, "Productive space: Performance texts in the late Ming" (PhD diss. University of California, Berkeley, 2003), 220.

球, “Stupid Flower-bud” 呆骨朵, “The Rude Aunt” 蛮姑儿 and so on.¹⁵⁸ Meanwhile, outside the literati circles, in the countryside and streets, these folk songs continued to exist and develop in their original forms.

In short, then, the boundary between *xiaoqu* and *sanqu* in the Ming period can be said to be blurred – an argument that has also been forwarded by Kathryn Lowry and Judith Zeitlin. To a layperson, differentiating between them based solely on lyric texts would be challenging, as they share very similar elements. Both explore similar themes, while bringing together both elegant and rustic elements. Additionally, as Lowry demonstrates, they often share tune names, despite having different sentence patterns and rhyme schemes.¹⁵⁹ Zeitlin builds on Lowry’s argument, claiming that the tunes and lyrics of both *sanqu* and *xiaoqu*, would have been treated flexibly by performers (in many cases, courtesans), undergoing alterations through processes of interpretation and improvisation.¹⁶⁰

The Ming era’s flourishing brothel culture correlated positively with the surge in the creation of popular *xiaoqu* and *sanqu*. Situated at the bottom of the social structure and yet interacting extensively with literati, the courtesans occupied an influential bridging position between “low” and “high” culture – their social predicament granting them close first-hand contact with both the folk culture of the masses (including the original *xiaoqu* detailed above) and the more “refined” forms of the writerly elite (including the more rigidly prescribed, classic forms of *sanqu*).¹⁶¹ As such, the courtesans were ideally situated to play a key role in the development, promotion, and dissemination of the newly favoured mid-way forms of song expression, skilfully blending aspects of both to meet (and, no doubt, influence) the literati’s tastes. It is no surprise, therefore, that the Ming period sources so extensively depict brothels as primary forums for the cultivation, expression, and appreciation of *xiaoqu* and *sanqu* during that era.

¹⁵⁸ Zhou Yubo, "Mingdai min'ge yanjiu 明代民歌研究 [Research on folk songs in the Ming dynasty]" (PhD diss. Nanjing Normal University, 2004), 3.

¹⁵⁹ Kathryn Lowry, "The Transmission of Popular Song in the Late Ming" (PhD diss. Harvard University, 1996), 242. Kathryn A. Lowry, *The tapestry of popular songs in 16th-and 17th century China: Reading, imitation, and desire* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2005), 3-5.

¹⁶⁰ Zeitlin, "The Gift of Song: Courtesans and Patrons in Late Ming and Early Qing Cultural Production," 24.

¹⁶¹ Gulik, *Sexual life in ancient China: A Preliminary Survey of Chinese Sex and Society from ca. 1500 B.C. till 1644 A.D.*, 308-11.

2.3 The Songs in *Wu Ji Bai Mei*

Now that the prevailing song genres of the Ming dynasty have been delineated, I will presently explore the Ming era poetry and song anthology *Wu Ji Bai Mei* 吴姬百媚 (Seductive Courtesans of the Suzhou Area) as a detailed case study. Directly related to a large-scale courtesan ranking activity that took place in late-Ming Suzhou, this anthology was penned by male literati of the period and edited by Wanyuzi 宛瑜子. It meticulously chronicles the 51 top-ranking courtesans (all of whom were active in the Suzhou area), giving each one an appraisal and a “flower name” (花名 *huaming*) corresponding to her individual temperament, as well as linking them with an extensive array of poems, *ci*, and *qu* lyrics. For example, Figure 2.1 (below) is a brief introduction to the second-ranked courtesan Feng Xi 冯喜 awarded the flower name “Red Plum” (红梅 *hongmei*) and described as follows in the corresponding commentary: “(she is) slim with delicate bones and a gorgeous face...[骨清色艳...]”.

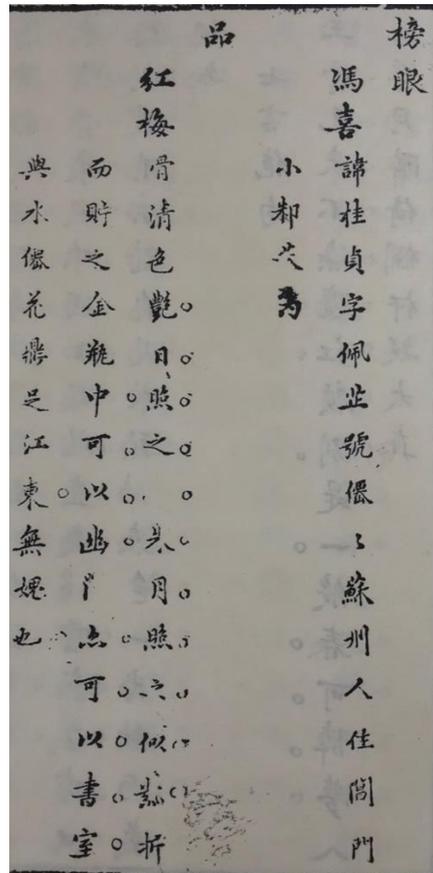


Figure 2.1: An introduction to Feng Xi, the second-ranked courtesan in *Wu Ji Bai Mei*.

These short introductions are usually followed by poetry and song lyrics concerning the courtesans, presumably composed at the time by members of the panel of literati who participated in the “flower tasting” event (See Chapter 3 for further discussion of the courtesan-ranking events). Figure 2.2 (below) presents three different genres of poetry: *ci* poetry and two types of *qu* (*xiaoqu* and *sanqu*), similar in literary form but subtly varied in terms of style and the meanings they connote.

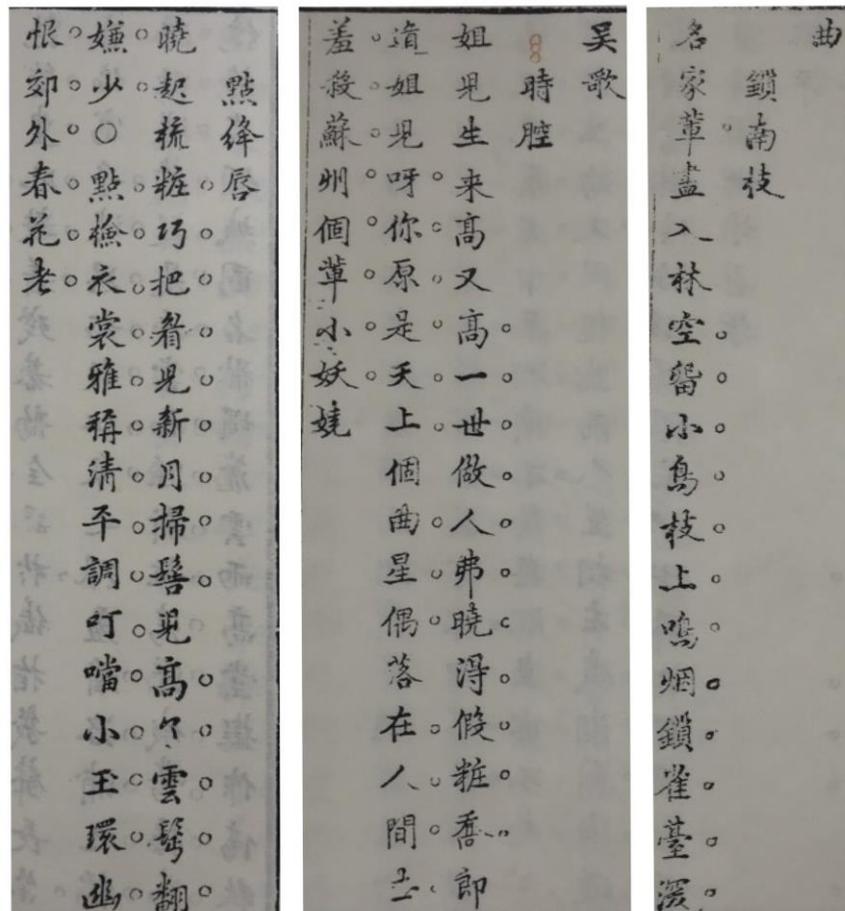


Figure 2.2: *Ci* poetry, *xiaoqu*, and *sanqu* (left, middle and right) relating to the first and second ranking courtesans Feng Yi and Feng Xi in *Wu Ji Bai Mei*.

(*Ci*) 点绛唇

晓迟梳妆，巧把眉儿新月扫，髻儿高了云鬓翻嫌少。点检衣裳，雅称清平调，叮当小玉环，幽恨郊外春花老。

[To the tune] Painting Crimson Lips

At dawn, slowly adorning myself, I skilfully paint my brows like a new moon's arc;
The bun atop my head is cloud-like, yet still lacking volume.

Checking my attire, I gracefully sing in the "clear and peaceful" style;

My small jade ring pendants tinkle,

And I harbour a quiet resentment for the aging spring flowers beyond the outskirts.

.....

(*Xiaoqu*) 吴歌 时腔

姐儿生来高又高，一世做人弗晓得假装乔。郎道姐儿呀，你原是天上个曲星偶
落在人间，○羞杀苏州个辈小妖娆。

[To the tune] Wu Songs: Songs of the Time

This sister was born very tall, and she doesn't know how to pretend.

My man says, "Sister, you were once a star of wisdom hanging in the sky, but you
accidentally fell to the mortal world, ...humbling all the seductive women in Suzhou.

.....

(*Sanqu*) 锁南枝

名家草，尽入林，空留小鸟枝上鸣。.....

[To the tune] Tying the Southern Branches

Great talents depart, entering the deep woods, leaving only the birds singing on the
branches...

A total of 25 illustrations are included in the collection, portraying courtesans and their leisure lives. They cover a wide range of subjects, from indoor or garden scenes, such as poetry writing, *weiqi* playing, ball playing, *guqin* zither playing, and singing, to outdoor activities such as spring outings, moon-watching, boating, and lotus picking.¹⁶² Each illustration is associated with a particular courtesan.

¹⁶² Some of the illustrations can be found in Chapter 6.

The preface, written by Wanyuzi, highlights some of the key concerns of the literati about the courtesan culture of the time. He highly praises the women's "seductiveness" (媚 *mei*), and distinguishes different levels of seductiveness:

虽然，媚亦有辨焉：涂脂抹粉，妆点颜色，媚之下也；娇歌嫩舞，夸诩伎俩，媚之中也；天然色韵，亦不脂粉，亦不伎俩，而自令人淫，媚而上矣。¹⁶³

Nevertheless, there are distinctions between types of seductiveness (*mei*): applying makeup and embellishing one's appearance is low level seductiveness; singing sweet songs, performing tender dances, and flaunting and manipulating are mid-level seductiveness; having natural beauty without any make up and without any tricks, yet being naturally captivating, is the highest level of seductiveness.

Wanyuzi goes on to state:

女子中甘心媚之者，似惟秦楼女，然有栖神于澹者，有寄想于悠者，有托怀于旷，寓情于傲，标韵于落拓者，皆自成一品格而不露一毫媚态者也，乃真态者。¹⁶⁴

The only women who are willing to charm (*mei*) others seem to be those who live in the Qin Tower.¹⁶⁵ However, some of them find solace in simplicity, others seek contentment in tranquillity, some confide in the vastness, others express their sentiments with self-esteem, and some embrace a carefree spirit. They all possess individual qualities without the slightest hint of pretentious charm. These are the truly genuine people.

This passage stresses the high value that the Ming literati attached to "genuineness" (真 *zhen*) and their admiration for courtesans possessing "true attitudes" (真态 *zhentai*). Wanyuzi

¹⁶³ Wanyuzi, *Wu ji bai mei* 吴姬百媚 [Seductive courtesans of the Suzhou area], preface.

¹⁶⁴ Wanyuzi, *Wu ji bai mei* 吴姬百媚 [Seductive courtesans of the Suzhou area], preface.

¹⁶⁵ Here, referring to or courtesans.

asserts that among those “willing to charm others” – referring to the courtesans – there are many who have noble and virtuous qualities. While they are acknowledged to vary greatly in their characteristics, many are identified as “unrivalled” for their “charms” (媚 *mei*) and “genuine manners” (真态 *zhentai*). Wanyuzi’s statement suggests that, at least in the case of the courtesan-ranking event depicted in *Wu Ji Bai Mei*, one of the key criteria for evaluating the courtesans was the naturalness and genuineness in their beauty, seemingly devoid of artifice.

There is no doubt that *Wu Ji Bai Mei* serves as a crucial resource for examining the musical activities and repertoire of Ming courtesans. However, it has remained relatively overlooked in scholarly research,¹⁶⁶ and this current study is the first to systematically and thoroughly examine the songs, and identify their most salient defining characteristics. In the Appendix, I categorize the *qu* featured in *Wu Ji Bai Mei* according to the frequency with which the respective tune names appear, ranging from most to least prevalent and alphabetically (with the sole exception of *Huzhou Shan’ge*, which is grouped with the other *xiaoqu*). Particular attention is devoted to identifying the forms, structures, and rhyme schemes in the lyrics, and the contents of the opening line and other salient lines are translated and analysed in order to ascertain the prevailing themes and sentiments encapsulated therein.

2.4 Observations and Summary

In the text above, I have catalogued all the *qu* that appear in the *Wu Ji Bai Mei* collection in tabular form, focusing on their format, structure, and the contents of the first line of lyrics, while also pinpointing the main themes and prevailing sentiments.

¹⁶⁶ Some scholars who focus on Ming era courtesans’ music have referred to *Wu Ji Bai Mei* in a rather broad way, including: Zeitlin, "The Gift of Song: Courtesans and Patrons in Late Ming and Early Qing Cultural Production," 24. Lowry, "The Transmission of Popular Song in the Late Ming," 242. Lowry, *The tapestry of popular songs in 16th-and 17th century China: Reading, imitation, and desire*, 293.

2.4.1 Variety in Forms, Structures, and Sentiments

From a structural point of view, the songs in the collection exhibit enormous variation in terms of form and structure (see Appendix). Furthermore, the various named tunes (*qupai*) seem to be associated with different degrees of flexible treatment. For some, all the songs strictly adhere to the same standard model, demonstrating exactly the same character numbers and rhyme schemes in their lines. This is the case for the following *sanqu* tunes, for example: *Jiang'er Shui* 江儿水, *Lan Hua Mei* 懒画眉, *Suo Nan Zhi* 锁南枝, *Yu Jiao Zhi* 玉交织, *Guizhi Xiang* 桂枝香, *Huang Ying Er* 黄莺儿, *Hupo Mao'er Zhui* 琥珀猫儿坠, *Jie Jie Gao* 节节高, *Jie San Cheng* 解三醒, *Yuanlin Hao* 园林好, and *Zhu Ma Tin* 驻马听 (see Appendix).

Meanwhile, other named tunes (*qupai*) are associated with a moderately flexible treatment of form: the various songs composed for them evince slightly different line lengths and rhyme schemes. For instance, most of the songs classified as *Wu Ge* 吴歌 • *Shi Qiang* 时腔 begin with the exact same sentence “姐儿生来 This sister was born...”, yet their number of lines varies between five or six; moreover, while the number of characters in the third line is fixed at five, the numbers of characters in the other lines vary. As another example, in the category of *Huzhou Shan'ge* 湖州山歌 • *Shi Qiang* 时腔, the second and fourth lines are of fixed length but the other lines exhibit a little variation. Regarding the *sanqu* songs in the collection, the following tunes also exhibit a moderate degree of variation: *Bu Bu Jiao* 步步娇, *Zui Dongfeng/Chenzui Dongfeng* 醉东风/沉醉东风, *Shua Hai'er* 耍孩儿, *Chuan Bo Zhao* 川拨棹, *Wutong Shu* 梧桐树, and *Zao Luo Pao* 皂罗袍.

Finally, other named tunes in the collection are associated with a still more flexible treatment of form. This is the case for all three *xiaoqu* (popular songs) *qupai*, demonstrating *xiaoqu*'s inherently more pronounced variability. However, several *sanqu* also diverge greatly from the standards of the time, including the single songs for *Gu Mei Jiu* 沽美酒 and *Yan'er Luo* 雁儿落. It is worth noting that, in many cases, the lyrics of *xiaoqu* are written from the first-person perspective, while those of *sanqu* are predominantly narrated from the third-person perspective. Interestingly, then, the objective viewpoint appears to correlate with formal rigidity.

At the same time, the song lyrics in *Wu Ji Bai Mei* showcase a variety of themes and

emotions (see Appendix). Concerning the prevailing sentiments, I find that the following five emotions are well represented: love (including, in a great many cases, admiration), joy (including humour and jokes), sadness, anxiousness, and anger. These are consistent with the five basic emotions I later identify as thoroughly pervasive in courtesan-related poetry from the period (in Chapter 4), except that anxiousness and anger are only seldom expressed. This is hardly surprising, given *Wu Ji Bai Mei*'s focus on praising the courtesans' beauty. Some of the recurring emotion-related words in the song texts include the following:

Emotions	Words relating to emotions
Love	爱你 (loving you); 堪爱 (truly lovable); 爱煞他 (crazy about her/him); 真堪羨 (truly enviable); 多情 (too much emotion; or amorous); 含情 (tenderly); 情痴 (infatuated); 娇(charm/delicate); 怜(adore/pity); 风流 (charm/romantic); 眉来眼去 (exchanging flirting glances); 偏惹游蜂恋 (drawing the affection of wandering bees).
Joy	笑 (smile); 喜相依 (relying on each other happily); 欢 (joyous); 欢韶光 (joyful time); 意兴翩翩 (with a sprightly spirit); 兴自高 (spirits naturally lifted).
Sadness	恨杀/恨 (resenting); 愁 (sorrow); 愁如织 (sorrows woven together); 相思 (longing/lovesickness); 相思泪 (tears of longing); 珠泪横抛 (pearl-like tears being casted aside); 念 (missing); 冷凄凄 (cold and desolate); 寂寥 (desolate); 伤怀 (full of sorrow); 断肠/肠断 (heart-broken); 甘消瘦 (plaintively slender); 伤春 (lamenting the spring); 香清地冷 (the fragrance is faded away and the ground is cold); 鼓偏幽 (the sound of the drums becomes deep and serene).
Anxiousness	只怕 (only afraid that...); 只落得 (only end up...); 凄惶 (distressed); 奈何 (how to handle...?); 难禁受 (hard to endure); 空留 (in vain); 空嗟事已非 (sighing in vain for matters have changed).
Anger	恨恼 (bitterly vexed); 恼人 (annoying); 恨杀 (deep loathing).

Table 2.1: Emotions and some emotion-related words in *Wu Ji Bai Mei*.

2.4.2 Songs Depicting Courtesans

This brings us to another pertinent question: how are the courtesans commonly depicted in these songs? A considerable number of lyrics shed light on the lives of courtesans, often referencing details about their occupation and the environments they inhabited. Meanwhile, many place significant emphasis on complimenting their femininity and detailing their physical attributes and other enticing qualities, often making extensive use of metaphors and similes.

2.4.2.1 Femininity as a key concern

Firstly, a substantial portion of the lyrics extol courtesans' femininity in a general manner. For instance, words of praise such as *fengliu* 风流 (romantically charming),¹⁶⁷ *jiao* 娇 (delicately sweet),¹⁶⁸ *yaorao* 妖娆 (enchanting and coquettish),¹⁶⁹ *yaotiao* 窈窕 (gentle and graceful),¹⁷⁰ *mei* 媚 (charming),¹⁷¹ and *pinting* 聘婷 (having a graceful demeanour)¹⁷² abound.

Many lyrics portray the courtesans' physical appearance in great detail. Favour of fair skin is prevalent. For example, in a song set to the tune *Hupo Mao'er Zhui* 琥珀猫儿坠, a

¹⁶⁷ Songs in *Wu Ji Bai Mei* containing the word *fengliu* 风流 include: *Lan Hua Mei* 懒画眉 (1), *Dian Jiang Chun* 点绛唇, *Huang Ying'er* 黄莺儿 (1), *Shua Hai'er* 耍孩儿 (2), *Wutong Shu* 梧桐树, *Zhu Ma Tin* 驻马听, *Wu Ge* 吴歌 • *Shi Qiang* 时腔 (8、13).

¹⁶⁸ Songs containing the word *jiao* 娇 (delicately sweet) include: *Shua Hai'er* 耍孩儿 (1、2), *Wutong Shu* 梧桐树 (2), *Gua Zhi'er* 挂枝儿 (5 娇, 7 闪), *Bu Bu Jiao* 步步娇 (3), *Yu Jiao Zhi* 玉交枝 (1), *Dian Jiang Chun* 点绛唇, *Wu Ge* 吴歌 • *Shi Qiang* 时腔 (12).

¹⁶⁹ Songs containing the word *yaorao* 妖娆 include: *Wu Ge* 吴歌 • *Shi Qiang* 时腔 (8, 9), *hua Hai'er* 耍孩儿 (1).

¹⁷⁰ Songs containing the word *yaotiao* 窈窕 include: *Hong Na'ao* 红衲袄 (1), *Hupo Mao'er Zhui* 琥珀猫儿坠 (2).

¹⁷¹ Songs containing the word *mei* 媚 include: *Zhuo Mu'er* 啄木儿 (the first song, using the term “charming bones 骨媚”), *Suo Nan Zhi* 锁南枝 (the second piece, using the term “A hundred charms” 百媚); *Wu Tong Shu* 梧桐树 (2).

¹⁷² Songs containing the word *pinting* 聘婷 include: *Yi Feng Shu* 一封书 and *Yi Chun Ling* 宜春令.

woman has “frosty skin and snowy bones 霜肌雪骨”; the twelfth song of *Wu Ge* 吴歌 • *Shiqiang* 时腔 describes a prostitute as having “snow white skin 雪白个肌肤” that truly allures people. The phrase “bright eyes and white teeth 明眸皓齿” is often used to praise women’s teeth, appearing for example in the first song set to *Lan Hua Mei* 懒画眉 and the first song of *Zhu Ma Ting* 驻马听. Compliments about eyes and eyebrows are also not unusual. For example, the first song of *Shua Hai’er* 耍孩儿 uses the phrase “willow-like eyebrows accentuate her eyes 柳叶眉儿眼上标” to portray a courtesan’s face; a *Jie San Cheng* 解三醒 song describes a courtesan’s “eyebrows like hooks 眉叶如钩”; and the second song of the *xiaoqu Gua Zhi’er* 挂枝儿 compliments a beauty for her “pretty eyes 俏眼儿”. There are also compliments aimed at courtesans’ figures and postures. The second song of *Gua Zhi’er* 挂枝儿, entitled “Pretty 俏”, describes a woman’s “pretty body as light as a dancing swallow 俏身躯轻如舞燕”; the second song of *Suo Nan Zhi* 锁南枝 acclaims a courtesan’s “thin waist 腰肢瘦”; and the second song of *Zao Luo Pao* 皂罗袍 uses a rhyming line to praise a courtesan’s slim figure: “Her cold appearance is more charming than a Bajiao, and her tender appearance can disturb one’s heart. 潇潇有韵比芭蕉，依依多态令人闹。”

2.4.2.2 *The extensive use of metaphors and similes: flowers and jade*

While a diverse range of metaphors and similes are applied to elucidate the courtesans’ beauty, associations with flowers are especially prevalent. Traditionally, each courtesan was assigned a unique “flower name” based on her rank, commonly determined collectively by the literati who participated in courtesan ranking activities, taking into consideration both her physical appearance and her inner personality.

Delicate appearances and fragrances are common traits shared by flowers and Ming courtesans. Two prevalent expressions include *hua rong* 花容 “flower face”, as seen in the song entitled *Shua Hai’er* 耍孩儿; and *fang rong* 芳容 “fragrant face”, as evident in the song entitled *Gui Zhi Xiang* 桂枝香. Several lines from *Zao Luo Pao* 皂罗袍 perfectly capture these two associated attributes admired in courtesans — vibrant beauty and rich scent.

Here, the poet notes “...seeing how charming and fragrant this flower is,” with skin “soaked in aroma”, and eyebrows “taken by showy colours” (...见此花香艳。香气浸肌肤，艳色侵眉宇”。 Meanwhile, the fourth song of *Yu Jiao Zhi* 玉交枝 likens a courtesan to crab-apple flowers, while the thirteenth song of *Wu Ge* 吴歌 • *Shiqiang* 时腔 compares a courtesan to balsam flowers. Similar lyrics in *Bu Bu Jiao* 步步娇 (the second song) and *Wu Ge* 吴歌 • *Shiqiang* 时腔 (the third song) equate courtesans to peach blossom.

Jade is also frequently employed as a metaphor, symbolizing rarity, preciousness, and beauty. Examples include “a person like jade 人如玉” (from the fifth song of *Bu Bu Jiao* 步步娇), “jade person 玉人” (from the first song of *Da Sheng Yue* 大勝乐), and “slim jade hands 纤纤玉手” (from the first song of *Jie San Cheng* 解三醒).

2.4.2.3 *The Courtesans’ strategies and inner qualities*

The lyrics in *Wu Ji Bai Mei* also devote much attention to pinpointing the courtesans’ various seductive strategies, which are explored further in Chapter 6. For instance, in the seventh song of *Jiang’er Shui* 江儿水, a courtesan “peeks at me with her amorous eyes 一转秋波觑我”, and in the first song of *Zhuo Mu’er* 啄木儿, a beauty is “hastily combing her cloud-like hair.....(the texts are vague here), [seeing her] seduces all the talents in the Three Wu area. 忙梳云鬓...,¹⁷³ [眼见得]勾引三吴诸俊英”.

However, it is worth noting that a relatively small number of song texts also focus on inner qualities. For example, the fourth song of *Jiang’er Shui* 江儿水 praises a courtesan’s “clever nature 聪明性” and the first song of *Gua Zhi’er* 挂枝儿 praises a courtesan for her “exquisite and harmonious mind 灵犀常透”. Meanwhile, one of the songs using *Jiang’er Shui* 江儿水 describes a courtesan as “clever but self-indulgent 聪明偏自耽”, and another (with a missing title) describes “her heart like snow 君心似雪”, a metaphor for the woman’s purity and coolness.

¹⁷³ *Yun bin* 云鬓 (cloud-like hair) refers to a fashionable woman’s hairstyle. In ancient China, women often styled their hair so it looked thick, soft, and cloud-like, symbolizing beauty and grace.

2.4.3 The Courtesans' Talents

In addition to evaluating the courtesans' physical and inner qualities, a significant portion of the song-texts in *Wu Ji Bai Mei* showcase their talents.

2.4.3.1 Musical talents

A great many of the songs celebrate the courtesans' musical abilities and, most commonly, their skills as singers. For example, the first song of *Shua Hai'er* 耍孩儿 likens a courtesan's singing to "delicate birdsong" 一声声，如娇鸟;. The fourth song of *Zui Dongfeng/ Chenzui Dongfeng* 醉东风/ 沉醉东风 praises a courtesan for her "delicate singing voice 歌喉娇媚". In *Zhu Ma Tin* 驻马听 (the second song), a singer's performance is lauded for featuring "unrivalled tunes that obstruct clouds from moving 遏云绝调". A song from *Xiang Liu Niang* 香柳娘 commends a sixteen-year-old courtesan for her "new voice drawing breath from her throat 新声偏引喉间气". Meanwhile, the first song of *Guizhi Xiang* 桂枝香 celebrates a courtesan's interpretative skills: "When she reads the lyrics and sings, her voice is as elegant as white snow, her singing delicate and soft, lingering in the beams. 度词儿白雪堪称，声袅袅绕梁非谬。" The first song of *Yi Jiang Feng* 一江风 commends a woman's ability to rapidly learn vocal material: "Singing the lyrics, after only three times of learning, she grasps it by herself. 唱词儿，教得三遭，便自般般会。" Other similar examples include the fifth song of *Lan Hua Mei* 懒画眉,¹⁷⁴ the second song of *Bu Bu Jiao* 步步娇,¹⁷⁵ a song from *Jie San Cheng* 解三醒,¹⁷⁶ the first song of *Zhu Ma Tin* 驻马听, and the song titled "Ode to the tastes 咏情趣" set to *Yu Jiao Zhi* 玉交枝. All of these songs vigorously praise courtesans for their singing abilities, demonstrating just how highly valued such skills were in the literati's worldview.

Furthermore, certain lyrics also highlight courtesans' skills as instrumentalists. For example, the first song of *Huang Ying'er* 黄莺儿 applauds a courtesan's willingness to play

¹⁷⁴ "She sings a flying song that even makes me obsessed 一曲飞声我也痴".

¹⁷⁵ "Her charming singing voice lingers in the wind 音韵随风转".

¹⁷⁶ "Singing a song among the flowers, she owns all the romance 花间一曲，占断风流".

the zither at any point,¹⁷⁷ and another song set to *Yu Bao Du* 玉抱肚 pinpoints a courtesan's skill at playing the “jade zither”. In certain courtesan performance contexts, of course, music was also intimately associated with dance, and dancing skills are acknowledged in the second songs of both *Shan Po Yang* 山坡羊 and *Suo Nan Zhi* 锁南枝.

2.4.3.2 Eloquence, literary talents, and other arts

Several songs praise the courtesans' eloquence, such as the seventh song of *Jiang'er Shui* 江儿水, which mentions a courtesan “with an eloquent mouth 口儿逞辩.” Meanwhile, the fourth song of *Suo Nan Zhi* 锁南枝 applauds a courtesan's “great breadth of mind and clear words 胸襟洒落句语清,” and a song from *Zhuo Mu Er* 啄木儿 admires how a courtesan's “elegant demeanour is expressed in her words 气韵潇疏出语句.” Just as their skills at the spoken word are celebrated, so are their literary talents, albeit substantially less frequently, indicating the primacy of performance in their occupation. For instance, the fourth song-text of *Jiang Er Shui* 江儿水, entitled “Ode to Skill 咏技艺,” praises a courtesan who “occasionally writes amazing verses 偶然出得惊人句.” And, significantly, it is only much more seldom that mention is made of a courtesan's skills as a painter – only in the sixth song of *Gua Zhi'er* 挂枝儿, entitled “Looks 态.”

Because playing *weiqi* was a much-favoured pastime amongst the literati, it is not surprising to find mention of courtesans playing the game also within the *Wu Ji Bai Mei* collection. Specifically, their skills in *weiqi* playing are mentioned in four songs: the first song “Xing 兴” and the second song “Qiao 俏” of *Gua Zhi'er* 挂枝儿, the fourth song “Ode to Skills 咏技艺” of *Jiang'er Shui* 江儿水, and the second song “Ode to Love 咏情趣” of *Yu Jiao Zhi* 玉交枝.

¹⁷⁷ “Always ready to lend a hand on strings 逢人肯撈”.

2.4.3.3 Drinking capacity and tea tasting

An ability to consume large volumes of alcohol was a competitive advantage in the Ming-era courtesan industry. This is suggested by songs such as the second songs of *Shua Hai'er* 耍孩儿 and *Guizhi Xiang* 桂枝香, which celebrate a courtesan's drinking capacity as “like the ocean 量如沧海.” Others, like the second songs of *Zao Luo Pao* 皂罗袍 and *Bu Bu Jiao* 步步娇, express admiration when “a thousand cups won't make her drunk 千钟不醉.” Further examples can be found in the third *Shua Hai'er* 耍孩儿, second *Jiang'er Shui* 江儿水, third *Lan Hua Mei* 懒画眉, and eleventh *Wu Ge* 吴歌 • *Shiqiang* 时腔.

Tea tasting, another highly valued social skill, is depicted in texts such as the fourth song of *Jiang'er Shui* 江儿水, which describes “raising a nice cup of tea to each other 佳茗相抬”; the second song of *Yu Jiao Zhi* 玉交枝, in which a courtesan named Youlan 幼兰 prepares “one incense, one cup of tea, and one *weiqi* 一香一茗一棋者” when meeting with guests; and the first song of *Yu Bao Du* 玉抱肚, which praises a courtesan's suave temperament as she “boils tea and offers it (when meeting talented people) 遇才人、烹茶献之.”

2.4.4 Negative Criticism

Although the majority of the lyrics are effusive in their praise, a small fraction, predominantly found in the latter part of the list, are imbued with negatively critical content. Certain lyrics subtly or overtly convey discontent with the courtesans' physical appearances. For instance, the first song of *Yu Bao Du* 玉抱肚 extols the virtuosity of a courtesan in playing the *yaoqin* 瑶琴 (jade zither), yet concludes with a lamentation of her mundane appearance: “only hating that she was born with an ordinary appearance 所恨生来貌不奇”. Additionally, the fourth song of *Huzhou Shan'ge* 湖州山歌 • *Shi Qiang* 时腔 employs hyperbole to describe a prostitute who is excessively slender: “a handful of bones scares my man 一把骨头吓坏子个郎”. Discontent is also expressed with regard to other facets. For

instance, the first song of *Yi Chun Ling* 宜春令 acknowledges the beauty and gracefulness of the courtesan Xu Shou, but then criticizes her low spirits and vulgar demeanour: “Her low spirits and vulgar bearings (one missing word here) can ruin people’s cheerful moods. 气韵粗○，败人清兴。”

2.4.5 Lamenting Courtesans’ Lives and Fates

Another recurring motif in these song-texts is the expression of concern regarding the courtesans’ future lives, typically lamenting their inevitable loss of beauty and their uncertain fates. Some songs suggest that a particular courtesan may have found herself living in less-than-ideal circumstances. For instance, the third song of *Jiang’er Shui* 江儿水 characterizes a courtesan as “an unexpected amazing jade falling into the dusty world by mistake 飞瓊误落风尘里”. The first song of *Lan Hua Mei* 懒画眉 prognosticates a courtesan’s potential destiny, alluding to ambitions to “escape” from brothel life.¹⁷⁸ Analogous sentiments are echoed in the first and third songs of *Zui Dongfeng/Chenzui Dongfeng* 醉东风/沉醉东风, which lament the bleak prospects faced by two talented and beautiful courtesans subsequent to their immersion in the entertainment industry. This lamentation metamorphoses into a profound anxiety in the fourth song of the same tune, where the lyrics voice concern for a romantic and lovelorn courtesan, apprehensive that she may ultimately perish due to her emotional vulnerabilities: “I’m afraid in another ten years, the east wind will send her off. 再十年怕，东风送伊。” Similarly, the third and fifth songs of *Bu Bu Jiao* 步步娇 respectively lament, “[pity her] sinking into prostitution early [可怜]流落风尘早”, and “under an unlucky star (she) went with the wind 命薄随风去”. The second song of *Yuanlin Hao* 园林好, entitled “Ode to a family background 咏原起”, reflects on the misfortunes of a courtesan who, despite her auspicious beginnings in a respectable family, ultimately finds

¹⁷⁸ “Even if escaping the brothel’s line, still she’ll be the moon’s companion in her prime. 假饶脱却烟花阵，终是幽闺伴月人。”

herself ensnared in the brothel industry due to her husband's infidelity.¹⁷⁹ Other song-texts that resonate with similar themes include the third and thirteenth songs of *Gua Zhi'er* 挂枝儿, the second song of *Jie Jie Gao* 节节高, the second song of *Yuan Lin Hao* 园林好, the first song of *Shan Po Yang* 山坡羊, the two songs of *Zhu Ma Tin* 驻马听, and the sole song set to *Hong Na'ao* 红衲袄.

Some lyrics eloquently lament the fleeting nature of time, advising courtesans and readers alike to treasure each moment. In the second song of *Jie Jie Gao* 节节高, the lyrics paint a poignant scene of fallen flowers: “The crab-apples were blown down by the wind overnight, and the red flowers are all over the ground with no-one sweeping them. 海棠一夜被风吹, 红英满地无人扫。” Similarly, the third song of *Jiang Er Shui* 江儿水 offers a reminder to courtesans not to take their ephemeral fame for granted, cautioning: “[You] shouldn't feel secure about your overnight stardom, [note that] flowers are never sturdy. [你]莫恃知名早, [须知]花不牢。” The lyrics of the first song of *Huang Ying'er* 黄莺儿 reflect on the transience of joy, noting “joyous times are like flowing water 欢韶光似水流”; while the fourth song of *Lan Hua Mei* 懒画眉 cautions, “[Just worrying that] as time goes by the flowers also wither and fall, we get to know someone to prevent future sufferings. [只愁]岁老花零落, 结识个人[儿]防后遭。” Other songs encapsulating this theme of cherishing time are found in the first song of *Yu Jiao Zhi* 玉交枝 and two of *Hupo Mao'er Zhui* 琥珀猫儿坠.

Furthermore, certain song-texts delve into the impermanence of the relationship between courtesans and their patrons. The fourth piece of *Bu Bu Jiao* 步步娇 touches upon the inevitability of parting ways, stating, “knowing each other for a long time, it's time for us to abandon each other 相识久相抛”; while the fifth song of *Jiang'er Shui* 江儿水 references “love affairs that last only one day 一天风月”. In summation, though some courtesans may have garnered acclaim for their exceptional talents and captivating appearances, their futures remained fraught with uncertainty, as the *Wu Ji Bai Mei* collection strongly emphasises.

¹⁷⁹ “When she was born, she had a good family to rely on, through no fault of her own she encountered her husband's betrayal, [ending up] making a living in brothels. 出身时良家可依, 没来由良人相背, [却]做了青楼生计。”

2.4.6 Some Concluding Thoughts

It is important to contextualize *Wu Ji Bai Mei* as a manifestation of the interactive dynamics between literati and courtesans in the Ming dynasty. *Wu Ji Bai Mei* was created on the basis of the prevalent Ming era practice *pinhua* 品花 (flower tasting), wherein literati would evaluate and rank regional courtesans based on their appearances and talents.¹⁸⁰ Those deemed worthy were bestowed with a unique “flower name”, along with tailor-made poems, *ci*, and *qu* lyrics crafted specifically for them. The metaphor of a flower, resplendent and fragrant in its bloom yet inevitably withering away, aptly symbolized the courtesan's career trajectory. This metaphor, underscored by its frequent occurrence, served as a poignant reminder of the temporal nature of beauty and acclaim. The institution of courtesan appraisal, a product of its time, flourished owing to the burgeoning publishing market and the vibrant courtesan culture that characterized the era.

The roles of these songs in the Ming era courtesan culture were multifaceted and significant. As performance repertoires, these lyrics served as a medium for courtesans to showcase their artistic talents and engage in cultural exchange with the literati-guests. The songs were not merely a form of entertainment; they were also a means by which courtesans could demonstrate their literary and musical knowledge, thereby elevating their social status and forging closer connections with the literati class. As such, the creation of these song-texts was intrinsically linked to the “flower tasting” banquets, where courtesans performed for literati-guests. The semi-improvised nature of these musical texts provided a rich and diverse repertoire for courtesans to draw upon during their performances, ensuring that the literati-guests were continually exposed to new and stimulating literary and musical material.

However, it is essential to recognise that the texts recorded in *Wu Ji Bai Mei* and other Ming period anthologies did not serve solely as material for live performance. As written artefacts exchanged between literati and their courtesan associates, some of these song texts

¹⁸⁰ This “flower tasting” activity is discussed in Chapter 3. In this regard, it is worth alluding to *Jin Ling Bai Mei* 金陵百媚 – another similar poetry and song anthology based explicitly on courtesan-ranking activities in Jinling (also located in the Jiangnan area).

may have seldom (or even never) been realised in public through the medium of song, rather existing purely in the textual dimension, appreciated by literati as *antou xi* 案头戏 (“closet drama” or “desk drama”).¹⁸¹ In this way, music could be “read” through texts and imagination, allowing the literati to experience music in a simple and convenient manner, while simultaneously recalling the vivid visual and auditory experiences from their memories.

To delve deeper into the intricacies of the Ming courtesans’ performances, I provide a comprehensive analysis in Chapter 3.

¹⁸¹ For a detailed discussion of closet drama, see: Yuming He, "Productive space: Performance texts in the late Ming" (PhD diss. University of California, Berkeley, 2003), 11-63.

3. Picturing Ming Courtesans' Performance

Having discussed the courtesans' repertoire in the previous chapter, it is now time to shift the focus onto how they rendered that repertoire via musical performance, and the varied settings in which they conducted their performances. The purpose of this chapter is to reconstruct the historical performance practices of these female performers as accurately as possible, through a close reading of extant Ming dynasty primary sources, comprising written records such as novels, poems, song texts, drama scripts, literary notes, and memoirs, and visual presentations such as woodblock paintings. I unfold the discussion with the following questions in mind: What styles of rendition were favoured within the courtesan-literati circles at that time, and what were the relationships between them? What contextual settings did the Ming courtesans perform in, and what types of interaction and performance practice prevailed as defining characteristics in those particular spaces? Finally, how can the various performance contexts and types be effectively categorised? Although it seems that the Ming period commentators did not explicitly distinguish between categories in this regard, my scrutiny of the primary sources has revealed some distinct patterns.

Before embarking on this investigation, it is helpful to briefly review the primary research that has been conducted into the Ming courtesans' performance practice. He Yuming (2003) focuses on courtesan performance in the private sphere in her monograph on the dynamics of performance and text in the late Ming period. She convincingly demonstrates that *xiaoqu* (vernacular folk ditties) were especially favoured in such spaces, and that the courtesans' performances were designed to bring about a convergence of morality, authenticity, and eroticism, often in controversial ways.¹⁸² In multiple publications, Judith Zeitlin elucidates the richly significant details permeating contemporaneous popular *sanqu*, *xiaoqu*, and operatic texts, and amply demonstrates that giving those texts emotive vitality through vocal performance was one of the courtesans' primary concerns.¹⁸³ Meanwhile,

¹⁸² He, "Productive space: Performance texts in the late Ming," 223.

¹⁸³ Zeitlin, "'Notes of Flesh' and the Courtesan's Song in Seventeenth-Century China." Zeitlin, "The Gift of

adopting a soundscape perspective, Peng Xu's 2014 study explores gendered performance styles in the singing culture of the late Ming Wanli period (1573–1620). She divides the Ming era courtesans' singing models into two categories – the feminine “oriole” style (singing in a soft and low voice) and the masculine “crane” style (singing in a sonorous voice). Peng argues that the courtesans would have selected, adapted, and integrated their performance styles according to circumstance, context, and perceived needs, seeking to offer a personalised, varied, and highly effective performance.¹⁸⁴ Nevertheless, few (if any) studies have sought to piece together the ‘bigger picture’ of the courtesans’ performance realms, drawing from a wealth of sources to identify the full range of contexts in which they performed, consider the impact of those contexts on performance style, and, furthermore, posit a scheme of categorisation. Hence, to fill the gaps in previous Ming courtesanship research, I endeavour to systematically summarise and classify the courtesans’ performance contexts and styles – ascertaining when and where the performances took place, the participants and repertoires involved, the types of performer/client interaction engendered through performance, as well as other salient aspects. As an initial point of departure, I propose that it is helpful to divide the courtesans’ performance contexts into categories based on scale and degree of publicness – two attributes that appear to have correlated quite closely. Sorted in descending order from large-scale/highly-public to tiny-scale/completely-private, these are as follows (Table 3.1, below):

Song: Courtesans and Patrons in Late Ming and Early Qing Cultural Production."

¹⁸⁴ Xu, "Courtesan vs. Literatus: Gendered Soundscapes and Aesthetics in Late-Ming Singing Culture," 407-08.

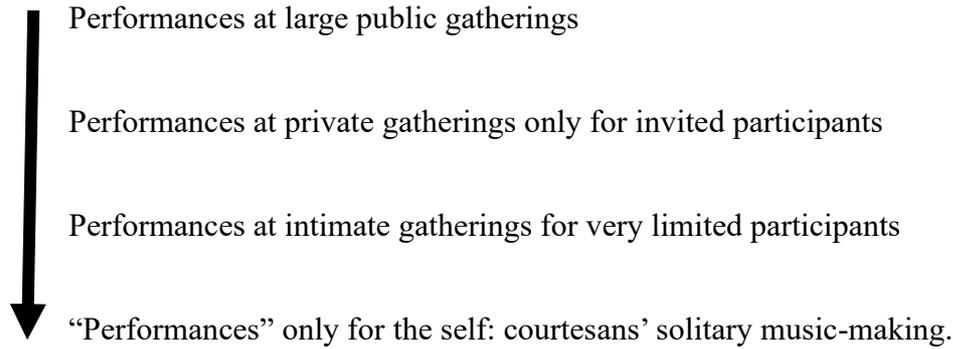


Table 3.1: The main categories of courtesans’ performance contexts, ordered from largest scale to smallest.

In my approach to classification, I also apply Thomas Turino’s key distinction between presentational and participative forms of performance – the former referring to cases where the performer presents a product to passive observers, while the latter denotes cases where audience members actively contribute to the performance product.¹⁸⁵ I also consider the degree to which the courtesans’ performance was foregrounded or backgrounded within a given context – the extent of audience attention being attributed to these female musicians. To begin this exploration, however, I think it pertinent to explore an essential stylistic distinction that was evidently a major concern amongst Ming period commentators and, therefore, no doubt also amongst courtesans – specifically, the distinction between the northern and southern styles of performance. Here, I chart their respective histories, the associated changes in fashion, and their implications for the courtesans’ artistry.

3.1 The Controversy between Northern and Southern Styles

In the Ming dynasty, it was standard practice to broadly categorise *qu* 曲 song forms by regional affiliation into northern and southern styles. Northern *qu*, or *beiqu* 北曲, is thought to have originated from the music of the Hu people in northern China, being

¹⁸⁵ Thomas Turino, *Music as social life: The politics of participation* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 25-26.

characterized by a “nomadic” musical style, heroic themes, rapid rhythms, and extensive use of accompanying stringed instruments such as the *pipa*, *zheng*, and *sanxian* (three-stringed Chinese lute).¹⁸⁶ This understanding is based on Ming period sources such as *Qu Lü* 曲律 (Rules of Qu) by theorist Wang Jide 王骥德 (1540-1623), where he refers to northern *qu*’s “over-reliance on string accompaniment 未免滞于弦索”¹⁸⁷ and emphasises its vigorous qualities.¹⁸⁸

……北曲遂擅盛一代；……且多染胡语，其声近晓以杀，南人不习也。

...Northern *qu* has flourished in this dynasty; ...It inevitably incorporates the Hu language, producing sounds similar to shouting and battling, which are unfamiliar to southern people.

Moreover, *Wan Li Ye Huo Bian* 万历野获编 (A Collection of Unofficial History of Wanli Period) – a book documenting lifestyles and stories from the middle/late Ming period – highlights the popularity of stringed instruments in the northern style, also mentioning a somewhat mysterious four-stringed lute (not a *pipa*):

今乐器中，有四弦：长项圆鞞者，北人最善弹之，俗名「琥珀槌」，……偶与教坊老妓谈及，曰此名「浑不是」，盖以状似箜篌，似三弦，似瑟瑟，似阮，似胡琴，而实皆非，故以为名。¹⁸⁹

Nowadays, there is a four-stringed instrument with a long neck and round drum-shaped body, which is best played by northerners, and has the vernacular name “amber hammer” ... Once, I happened to converse with an old courtesan of the Imperial Music Office, who remarked that its other name “neither is anything” was apt because, although its shape resembles various traditional instruments such as the *konghou*

¹⁸⁶ Che Xilun and Liu Xiaojing, "Xiaochang kao ‘小唱’ 考 [On discussion of xiaochang]," 186.

¹⁸⁷ Wang Jide, *Qulü zhushi* 曲律注释 [Notes on the rules of qu] [1624], 21.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Defu Shen, *Wanli ye huo bian* 万历野获编 [A collection of unofficial histories of the Wanli period], 650.

(Chinese harp), *sanxian* (a three-stringed plucked instrument), *pipa*, *ruan* (round-bodied lute), and *huqin* (two-stringed bowed fiddle), it does not precisely fit the characteristics of any of them.

A commonly accepted view among the literati of the Ming dynasty was that southern *qu* evolved from northern *qu*, while incorporating vernacular and bawdy elements from popular folk songs in the process. Wang Jide expounded upon this transformation as follows, praising the typical characteristics of the resulting southern *qu*:

.....迨季世入我明，又变而为南曲，婉丽妩媚，一唱三叹，于是美善兼至，极声调之致。¹⁹⁰

...By the time of the late Yuan dynasty, it (northern *qu*) had been introduced to the Ming dynasty, where it evolved into southern-style *qu*. The southern *qu* is elegant, delicate, and charming, typically featuring a verse followed by three sighs. In this way, it represents the pinnacle of beauty and refinement, achieving the ultimate in vocal melody.

Wang Jide was far from the only scholar to argue that southern *qu* derived from (and improved upon) northern *qu*. This perspective was, in fact, prevalent at the time. For example, Wang Shizhen 王世贞 (1526-1590) expressed a similar opinion in *Qu Zao* 曲藻 (Comments on *Qu*):

词不快北耳而后有北曲，北曲不谐南耳而后有南曲。¹⁹¹

Ci (a type of lyrical poetry) could not please the ears of the North, and so northern *qu* appeared. Similarly, northern *qu* could not harmonize with the ears of the South, giving rise to southern *qu*.

¹⁹⁰ Wang, *Qulü zhushi* 曲律注释 [Notes on the rules of *qu*] [1624], 21.

¹⁹¹ Wang Shizhen, "Qu zao 曲藻 (Wang's comments on *qu*)," in *Xin quyuan* 新曲苑 [A new anthology of songs], ed. Zhongmin Ren (Nanjing: Phoenix Publishing House, 2014), 84.

Nevertheless, despite such observations from major Ming period commentators, some modern scholars have questioned the received wisdom that the southern *qu* evolved from the northern *qu*. For example, Yang Dongfu, a scholar of ancient Chinese literature, provides compelling evidence that the literary style of southern *qu* most likely predates its northern counterpart.¹⁹² On the other hand, it is essential to acknowledge that the Ming commentators (such as Wang Jide and Wang Shizhen, above) were not referring to the literary style: rather, they are describing typical styles of delivery – in other words, performance practice.

Before reforms instigated by masters Wei Liangfu 魏良辅 (1489-1566) and Zhang Yetang 张野塘 (dates unknown, around mid-Ming), southern *qu* was typically accompanied by percussion instruments such as drums and clappers (*paiban* 拍板), or by wind instruments such as *sheng*, *dizi*, and *xiao*, with only limited use of stringed instruments like *pipa* (often played by the courtesan-performer herself or by an accompanying maid or servant boy). As Wang Shizhen noted, “The essence of northern *qu* lies in its strings, while the essence of southern *qu* lies in its clappers. 北力在弦，南力在板。”¹⁹³ Wei Liangfu similarly observed:¹⁹⁴

北曲之弦索，南曲之鼓板，犹方圆之必资于规矩。

The strings of the northern *qu* and the drums and clappers of the southern *qu* are as essential as a ruler and compass are for drawing a square or circle.

Another *qu* theorist, He Liangjun, simply argued that “southern songs do not harmonize with stringed and woodwind music 南歌或多与丝竹不协。”¹⁹⁵ The present-day scholar Peng Xu has elucidated these main points of difference in performance practice for northern and southern *qu*: northern songs were usually sung with self- or other-provided string accompaniment, whereas southern songs were usually performed solo with simple beats provided by clappers or bare hands.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹² Yang Dongfu and Liang Yang, "Zhongguo sanqu shi 中国散曲史 [The history of Chinese sanqu]," 26.

¹⁹³ Wang Shizhen, "Qu zao 曲藻 (Wang's comments on qu)," 84.

¹⁹⁴ Wei Liangfu, "Qulü 曲律 [Rules of qu]," in *Zhongguo gudian xiqu lunzhu jicheng* 中国古典戏曲论著集成 [Collection of treatises on classical Chinese opera] (Beijing: China Opera Press, 1959), 6.

¹⁹⁵ Wang Shizhen, "Qu zao 曲藻 (Wang's comments on qu)," 84.

¹⁹⁶ Xu, "Courtesan vs. Literatus: Gendered Soundscapes and Aesthetics in Late-Ming Singing Culture," 412-

In southern *qu* performance, wind instruments were sometimes employed to buttress the melody, while the drums and clappers were used to demarcate a regular metric structure – a reference point against which the vocal line would interact to evoke musical interest.¹⁹⁷ The clappers played the *ban* 板 (main beat or beats in the rhythm), while the drums handled the *yan* 眼 (other beats). The most common rhythm patterns in southern *qu* were “one *ban* one *yan*” and “one *ban* three *yan*”. “One *ban* one *yan*” was typically used in fast-tempo *qu*, equivalent to a 2/4 beat, consisting of one downbeat and one upbeat; and “one *ban* three *yan*” was generally employed in slow-tempo *qu*, equivalent to a 4/4 beat, comprising one downbeat and three less important beats.¹⁹⁸ It is difficult to determine the exact duration of these beats, as Ming period sources do not provide such details. However, it is reasonable to assume that the beat in faster tempi would have been more regular, whereas in slower, more expressive songs, the “one *ban* three *yan*” meter would have allowed for more flexibility in beat duration. In northern *qu*, meanwhile, it was typically stringed instruments that were employed to provide both melodic and rhythmic functions.¹⁹⁹

Diverse ancient sources attribute the differences between southern and northern *qu* to myriad contextual factors, ranging from geography and climate to social customs prevailing temperaments, and local dialects. As early as the Yuan dynasty, Yan Nan Zhi An 燕南芝庵²⁰⁰ highlights these factors in his treatise on *qu* music, *Chang Lun* 唱论 (Theory of Singing), where he states that “People in the South do not perform *qu*; people in the North do not sing *ge*. 南人不曲，北人不歌。”²⁰¹ Here, “*ge*” refers to *min’ge* 民歌 (folk song), another term

13.

¹⁹⁷ Li Ang, "Shen Chongsui quxue yanjiu 沈宠绥曲学研究 [A study on Shen Chongsui's qu]" (Master's thesis. Suzhou University, 2009), 17.

¹⁹⁸ Zhou Qin, *Suzhou kunqu* 苏州昆曲 [Suzhou kunqu opera] (Suzhou: Suzhou University Press, 2004), 65.

¹⁹⁹ Li Ang, "Shen Chongsui quxue yanjiu 沈宠绥曲学研究 [A study of Shen Chongsui's qu]," 17.

²⁰⁰ Yan Nan Zhi An 燕南芝庵, the author of the famous classical opera music treatise *Changlun* 唱论 (Theory of Singing), whose real name and life experiences are not known. It is believed that he was born before 1341.

²⁰¹ Yan Nanzhi'an, *Changlun* 唱论 [Theory of singing], 10 vols., vol. 1, *Zhongguo gudian xiqu lunzhu jicheng* 中国古典戏曲论著集成 [Collection of treatises on classical Chinese opera], (China Opera Press, 1959), 161.

for *xiaoqu*, as discussed earlier in this dissertation. Yan Nan Zhi An posits that southerners would be unable to appreciate the heroic, fast-paced *qu* of the north, while northerners would feel uncomfortable when faced with the melodious and delicate southern *qu*. The Ming official-literatus Li Kaixian 李开先 (1502-1568) similarly links regional temperaments and linguistic characteristics to performance styles:²⁰²

北之音调舒放雄雅，南则凄婉优柔，均出于风土之自然，不可强而弃也。

The tones of the North are expansive and majestic, while the tones of the South are poignant and gentle. Both are naturally derived from their respective climates and geographies, and should not be forcefully abandoned or changed.

The Ming literatus Wang Shizhen 王世贞 (1526-1560) presents a similar characterisation but, intriguingly, offers additional insights into the emotional dimensions of the respective styles, as embodied in both their texts and performance practice:

北字多而调促，促处见筋；南字少而调缓，缓处见眼。北则辞情多而声情少，南则辞情少而声情多。²⁰³

The northern songs have many characters in their lyrics and up-tempo tunes, evoking vitality in their briskness. In the southern style, there are fewer characters in the lyrics and the melody is slow, so the highlight is more on the tune. In the northern songs, the lyrics are rich in *qing* (emotions), but the *qing* is less perceptible in the voice; in the southern songs, the lyrics contain less *qing*, but the vocal emotions are richer.

Here, Wang Shizhen astutely identifies contrasting tendencies regarding the conveyance of *qing* (referring herein to sentiments and emotions) in the northern and southern styles. He seems to suggest that the northern style often featured more meticulously crafted texts, richly

²⁰² Li Kaixian, *Qiao long xi ci xu* 乔龙谿词序 [Preface to 'verses of Qiao Longxi'], ed. Bu Jian, Li Kaixian quanji 李开先全集 [The complete works of Li Kaixian], (Culture and Art Publishing House, 2004), 436-37.

²⁰³ Wang Shizhen, "Qu zao 曲藻 (Wang's comments on qu)," 84.

imbued with emotive content and bearing strong potential to resonate deeply with the audience members' inner worlds – but, unfortunately, the evocation of those emotions was somewhat compromised by the style's rapid pace and boisterous delivery, which ultimately rendered the texts' emotional content less perceptible and potent. In contrast, despite employing less richly *qing*-imbued lyrics, the southern style granted the performer more space and interpretive scope to execute more nuanced and gentle vocal stylings – essentially, facilitating accentuation of the emotional content in the words to render the listening experience more captivating and affecting. Wang Shizhen's perspective serves as a complementary exposition to my discourse on *qing* (presented in Chapter 4): for the Ming listenership, the efficacy of emotional conveyance in music was contingent upon a myriad of factors, including musical style and tempo and lyrical content, as well as the singers' own interpretative approach and vocal qualities. Although this insight appears not to have been put forward in other recent scholarship, I consider it to be highly significant, unveiling a Ming musical connoisseur's understanding regarding the dual modalities of emotional expression in music – textual expression (lyrics) and vocal presentation (singing voice).

3.1.1 From Separation to Integration: The Development of Southern *Qu*

As suggested above, the northern and southern styles appear to have been regionally separated and markedly distinct during their early histories. However, stylistic migrations and transformations occurred in conjunction with a shifting of the entertainment industry's centre down from the North into the more southerly Jiangnan region. This spurred a period of flourishing for southern *qu* culture, especially in the Nanjing and Suzhou areas. Meanwhile, the highly influential figure Wei Liangfu promoted some alterations within the southern style, which served to further promote its popularity, gradually eroding the northern style's living space.

In the early Ming period, many dramatists did not approve of the southern style being too entertaining. They criticized it as “decadent music”, featuring overly simple and formulaic lyrical content (echoing Wang Shizhen's observations cited in the previous section), focusing

excessively on love affairs between men and women, and lacking discussion of social issues. For example, the Ming dramatist Wang Jide pointed out:

（南）散曲绝难佳者。北词载 《太平乐府》、《雍熙乐府》、《词林摘艳》小令及长套多有妙绝可喜者，而南词独否。
.....只是短灯一二肤浅话头，强作嚎嘎，令盲小唱持坚木拍板，酒筵上吓不识字人可耳，何能当具眼者绳以三尺？²⁰⁴

(Southern) *sanqu* are rarely good. The northern songs recorded in “Taiping Yuefu”,²⁰⁵ “Yongxi Yuefu”, and “A Selection of Beauties from the Forest of Poetry” have many wonderful and joyful ditties and suites, while the southern songs are simply not up to par.

... (In southern *qu*,) it's just like making one or two superficial comments under a dimmed lamp and forcibly trying to be impressive, while a young or blind singer holds on to the wooden clappers to keep the beat – which might be passable for illiterate people at a drinking banquet, but how can it stand up to the scrutiny of the discerning?

Wang Jide further drew a direct contrast between the northern and southern *qu*, belittling the latter:

至于南曲，鹅鹤之陈[阵]久废，刁斗之设不闲[娴]。彩笔如林，尽是鸣鸣之调；红牙迭响，祇为靡靡之音。²⁰⁶

As for the southern *qu*, the grand sounds of the geese and cranes have long been abandoned, and the intricate embellishments are never adept.²⁰⁷ The colourful

²⁰⁴ From Wang Jide's *Qulü* 曲律, “Miscellaneous discourse, volume 39” 杂论 第三十九 下. Wang Jide, *Qulü zhushi* 曲律注释 [Notes on the rules of *qu*] [1624], 341-44.

²⁰⁵ Here, *yuefu* 乐府 denoting to poetry or verses that can be sung to music.

²⁰⁶ Wang Jide, *Qulü zhushi* 曲律注释 [Notes on the rules of *qu*] [1624], 7-8.

²⁰⁷ This line refers to the lack of attention paid to the fixed rhythms and tunes in southern songs, where songwriters were often unfamiliar with the established tune patterns. Wang Jide, *Qulü zhushi* 曲律注释 [Notes on the rules of *qu*] [1624], 13.

brushstroke too dense like the woods, with ungraceful melodies everywhere; the continuous resonance of the “red teeth”²⁰⁸ is solely for the effeminate sounds.

Likewise, the Ming dramatist Xu Wei 徐渭 (1521-1593) posited that the northern style could stir one’s passions due to the superior artistic merit in their lyrics, but the southern could lead people towards decadence and a gradual loss of spirit.²⁰⁹ However, elsewhere, he underscored the importance of avoiding prejudice and advocated a more balanced appreciation of southern music, praising its lyrics for their sincerity and simplicity.²¹⁰

However, the southern style appears to have gained popularity amongst all sectors (including the literati) following Wei Liangfu’s innovations, including his promotion of a more delicate and gentle singing style referred to as “water grinding voice” (*shui mo qiang* 水磨腔), and his insistence that, in performance, the melodic contours should be moulded to match the tone patterns of the lyrics. Meanwhile, in the entertainment heartlands of Jiangnan, it seems that the northern style declined until only a small portion remained.²¹¹

²⁰⁸ “Red teeth” (红牙 *hongya*), denoting percussion instruments such as the sandalwood clappers, and here referring to opera music.

²⁰⁹ “Listening to the northern *qu* energizes the spirit and makes one’s hair stand on end, instilling a courageous resolve. This reflects the prowess of the northern people in arousing anger, as expressed in the saying, ‘Their voices are fierce, establishing resentment.’ In contrast, the southern *qu* is elegant and beautiful, with its flowing, graceful turns that can make one feel as though they are floating, losing their defences unconsciously. This reflects the southern charm and gentleness, as captured in the saying, ‘The sound of a fallen nation is sorrowful and contemplative.’ 听北曲使人神气鹰扬，毛发洒淅，足以作人勇往之志。信胡人之善于鼓怒也，所谓“其声嚼杀以立怨”是已。南曲则纤徐锦，流丽婉转，使人飘飘然丧其所守而不自觉。信南方之柔媚也，所谓“亡国之音哀以思”是已。” See: Xu Wei, "Nanci xulu 南词叙录 [A treatise and catalogue of southern ci]," in *Zhongguo gudian xiqu lunzhu jicheng* 中国古典戏曲论著集成 [Collection of treatises on classical Chinese opera] (Beijing: China Drama Press, 1959), 241-45.

²¹⁰ “The Hu music has always been superior to Han music...Today, it is natural that northern *qu* is superior to southern *qu*....胡部自来高于汉音。...今日北曲，宜其高于南曲。”

“Some people are extremely devoted to northern *qu*, to the extent that they regard the southern *qu* sung by courtesans as taboo. Such fools! Is northern *qu* genuinely the legacy of famous Tang and Song dynasties’ musicians? It is nothing but a forgery from the frontier barbarians. If one can sing the music of the northern tribes, why not sing the music from Chinese villages? 有人酷信北曲，至以伎女南歌为犯禁，愚哉是子！北曲岂诚唐、宋名家之遗？不过出于边鄙裔夷之伪造耳。夷、狄之音可唱，中国村坊之音独不可唱？”

“Southern *qu*... has some commendable aspects, but the rest is just vulgar wording. However, it has one praiseworthy point: every verse embodies natural essence, without the excessive rhetoric of current literati. 南曲.....稍有可观，其余皆俚俗语也；然有一高处：句句是本色语，无今人时文气。” From: Xu Wei, "Nanci xulu 南词叙录 [A treatise and catalogue of southern ci]," 243.

²¹¹ Li Ang, "Shen Chongsui quxue yanjiu 沈宠绥曲学研究 [A study of Shen Chongsui’s *qu*]", 16.

By the mid-sixteenth century, it appears that the southern style of so-called “pure singing” (*qingchang* 清唱), featuring solo singing with minimal instrumental accompaniment, had become by far the most widely performed and appreciated style, with string-accompanied northern style usually rendered in a somewhat “southernized” form. The Ming era dramatist Shen Chongsui 沈宠绥 (?-1645), who lived in the Suzhou area, criticized this “southernization” of northern *qu*²¹², while also writing negatively of the “pure singing” style more generally. In particular, he contended that contemporary lyricists took excessive liberties when crafting their texts, diverging too much from the well-established standard patterns of character number and rhyme scheme. In this regard, my complete survey of the line-constructions and rhymes in the lyrics of *Wu Ji Bai Mei* 吴姬百媚 (Seductive Courtesans of the Suzhou Area) indicates that, in many cases, the poets did indeed deviate from the set tune pattern – removing or adding characters and/or rhyming words (See Chapter 2 and Appendix 1). Furthermore, Shen complained that, in performance, singers were now adapting the contours of the fixed tunes (*qupai*) to accommodate the shifting tone patterns within the lyrics, thereby altering and adjusting the melodies arbitrarily. He felt that this resulted in an unappealing misalignment between the lyrics (i.e., rhymes and prescribed word counts) and the original tunes. In this way, the traditional approach of “singing the lyrics according to the set tune” was inverted to “singing the melody according to the tonal pattern of the lyrics”, as explicated and advocated by Wei Liangfu.

²¹² “I sigh with emotion at the prosperity of southern tunes, the pure singing style replacing the plucking of strings, similar to how artisans abandon the plumb line. Moreover, the lyricists often write freely without conforming to conventions, and the lyrics of the songs may not always adhere to the rules. And the singers do not explore lyrics while conforming to the score, but modify *qu* according to the tone pattern of the lyrics, sedulously considering changes in the melody, though not realizing that they are mistaking key points (in the *qu*). The lyrics have gone off track first. Although the lyrics are proper, the melody has been lost. 慨自南调繁兴，以清讴废弹拨，不异匠氏之弃准绳，况词人率意挥毫，曲文非尽合矩，唱家又不按谱相稽，反就平仄例填之曲，刻意推敲，不知关头错认，曲词先已离轨，则字虽正而律且失矣。” In this passage, the term “score” refers to the standard, unmodified version of the tune pattern, despite today we understand the term “score” as the “written notation”. See: Shen Chongsui, “Duqu xuzhi 度曲须知 [Notes on rendering songs],” in *Zhongguo gudian xiqu lunzhu jicheng* 中国古典戏曲论著集成 [Collection of treatises on classical Chinese opera] (Beijing: National Academy of Chinese Opera), 240.

3.2 A Dynasty Obsessed with Voice: Pure Singing

Further exploration of the later Ming emphasis on “pure singing” (*qingchang* 清唱) reveals that the era’s music connoisseurs had developed a strong preoccupation – almost an obsession – with the powers of the voice. As mentioned above, pure singing involved a single performer singing to minimal musical accompaniment (most commonly clappers to provide rhythm), minimal stage props (often a fan), and some stage postures and movements.²¹³ This starkly contrasted with opera performance, which usually required a great deal of preparation – elaborate costumes and props, a small-scale accompaniment orchestra, and a well-defined performance space deliberately separated from the audience seating. It being impractical and unnecessary to perform a complete opera in a brothel or a private household at any point, courtesans would focus on specific *qu* instead to satisfy the guests’ infatuation with opera music and supply visual and auditory enjoyment, executing them in the form of pure singing. In her article about the song culture of seventeenth-century Chinese courtesans, Judith Zeitlin demonstrates that pure singing was consistent with the high-class courtesans’ aesthetic and moral conventions: for them, it bordered on disgrace to perform vigorous physical gestures on stage in public.²¹⁴ Furthermore, it was particularly well suited to the typical salon-style performance venue of the time (addressed further in the section “performances at private gatherings”), where small groups of people assembled, usually at night, to enjoy intimate interaction. In such contexts, the performer was able to gain the full attention of the audience, turning the attentional focus to the subtle inflections in her voice, and applying her skills to generate a powerful emotional connection with others, guiding their emotions (discussed further in Chapters 4 and 6) and deepening relationships.

The pure singing performance style, which attached great importance to elegant vocal singing style, was closely related to Wei Liangfu’s reformed southern *qu* styles. Although Wei originally studied northern *qu*, which was considered “orthodox”, he later turned to specialize

²¹³ Zeitlin, “‘Notes of Flesh’ and the Courtesan’s Song in Seventeenth-Century China,” 82-83.

²¹⁴ Zeitlin, “‘Notes of Flesh’ and the Courtesan’s Song in Seventeenth-Century China,” 82.

in southern *qu*.²¹⁵ In his essay dating from the period, Yu Huai discusses Wei's motivations for reforming southern *qu* and the process involved, concluding that a primary reason for Wei's reform was his firm conviction that it was too "frank and straightforward without any embedded aesthetic mood 率平直无意致".²¹⁶ Shen Chongsui asserts a similar view, suggesting that Wei "was born to review sounds and was angered by the fallacy and crudity of southern *qu* 生而审音，愤南曲之讹陋".²¹⁷

Wei Liangfu advocated "singing conforming to the tone of the character" 依字行腔, which meant manipulating all aspects of vocalization in accordance with the sound, rhythm and linguistic tone of the sung texts, so that the singer and audience could enter a new realm of singing characterised by "clear words, pure accent, and correct rhythm".²¹⁸ Wei's reforms prompted the literati circles to pay closer attention to the performers' vocal qualities and singing skills, assessing their abilities as revealers of textual content. An infatuation developed with the pursuit of the ultimate vocal beauty.

Discourse about the human singing voice was not unique to the Ming dynasty and can be traced back to the Jin dynasty (266-420). For example, Tao Yuanming 陶渊明 (365-427), a Jin era literatus, proposed that the human singing voice was superior in its expressiveness to other musical instruments: "Silk is inferior to bamboo, bamboo is inferior to flesh 丝不如竹，竹不如肉".²¹⁹ Here, "silk" refers to string music, "bamboo" refers to wind music, and

²¹⁵ Gu Lingsen, "Lun wei liangfu de shengqiang gaige 论魏良辅的声腔改革 [On Wei Liangfu's vocal reform]," *Yishu baijia* 艺术百家 5 (2008): 160.

²¹⁶ "When Liangfu first learned northern music, he was inferior to the northerner Wang Youshan, so he retreated to study southern *qu*, and concentrated so much that his footprints did not go downstairs for ten years. At that time, southern *qu* was frank and straightforward without any aesthetic mood embedded. Liangfu changed its ways of singing, transforming it into a new sound... 良辅初习北音，绌于北人王友山，退而镂心南曲，足迹不下楼十年。当是时，南曲率平直无意致。良辅转喉押调，度为新声..." See: Yu Huai, "Jichang yuan wen ge ji 寄畅园闻歌记 [Notes on hearing songs in Jichang garden]," in *Yuchu xin zhi* 虞初新志 [New records on Yuchu], ed. Chao Zhang (Hebei People's Publishing House, 1985), 66.

²¹⁷ Shen Chongsui, "Duqu xuzhi 度曲须知 [Notes on rendering songs]," in *Zhongguo gudian xiqu lunzhu jicheng* 中国古典戏曲论著集成 [Collection of treatises on classical Chinese opera] (Beijing: National Academy of Chinese Opera), 198.

²¹⁸ Gu Lingsen, "Lun wei liangfu de shengqiang gaige 论魏良辅的声腔改革 [On Wei Liangfu's vocal reform]," *Yishu baijia* 艺术百家 5 (2008): 160.

²¹⁹ Tao Yuanming and Yuan Xingpei, *Tao yuanming ji jianzhu* 陶渊明集笺注 [Notes and annotations on the compilation of Tao Yuanming's work], Library of Chinese Studies, (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company,

“flesh” refers to vocal music. Significantly, the drama critic Li Yu 李渔 cites Tao Yuanming’s theory in his 1671 work on Ming era aesthetics.²²⁰

It is worth noting that the formulation “silk and flesh” (*sirou* 丝肉) was commonly used by Ming literati to refer to the combinations of strings (such as *pipa* and *zheng*) and singing voices sometimes employed in private banquet performances. For example, in the *Banqiao Zaji* 板桥杂记 (Miscellaneous Records of the Plank Bridge), the phrase “silk and flesh compete with each other 丝肉竞陈”²²¹ is used to describe the lively interacting acoustic qualities of strings and singing in the courtesan houses.

To promote pure singing, the Ming dramatist Pan Zhiheng 潘之恒 (1536-1621), who specialized in leisure culture and drama criticism, even coined the term “flesh voice” (*rouyin* 肉音). He highly valued the human voice’s natural affective power and, again, stressed its superiority over other musical instruments.²²² As Judith Zeitlin points out, “flesh voice” serves as a metonymic designation of the human voice as an instrument of flesh, capable of profoundly altering one’s being.²²³ Li Yu also emphasized the pivotal prominence of vocal in women’s music, declaring that the natural qualities of the female voice were strongly correlated with the attractiveness of the female physical appearance:

至若妇人之音，则纯乎其为肉矣。……凡女子之善歌者，无论妍媸美恶，其声音皆迥别男人。貌不扬而声扬者有之，未有面目可观而声音不足听者也。²²⁴

Regarding women’s voices: they are pure flesh. ... Any woman who is good at singing, no matter whether she is beautiful or ugly, her voice is dramatically different from that of a man. There are unpleasant-looking women with great voices, but there are no beautiful women with poor voices.

2011), 336.

²²⁰ Li Yu, *Xian qing ou ji* 闲情偶寄 [Sketches of idle pleasures] [1671], vol. 1, 358.

²²¹ Yu Huai, "Miscellaneous Records of the Plank Bridge 板桥杂记 [1693]," 71. The translation for “丝肉竞陈” in this version is “various tunes and songs would strike up”, and the translation in the texts are done by the current author.

²²² Pan Zhiheng, *Pan zhiheng quhua* 潘之恒曲话 [Words on Pan Zhiheng’s qu], 8, 28.

²²³ Zeitlin, “Notes of Flesh’ and the Courtesan’s Song in Seventeenth-Century China,” 80-81.

²²⁴ Li Yu, *Xian qing ou ji* 闲情偶寄 [Sketches of idle pleasures] [1671], 1, 358.

Based on what we know of Li Yu, a frequent visitor to brothels, his judgment of women's voices largely reflects the expectations of Ming literati-music connoisseurs regarding courtesan performers: the performance should be primarily vocal; a woman's voice should possess distinctive qualities differentiating it from a man's; lastly, and perhaps most crucially, she should have an attractive appearance, as good looks were believed to enhance vocal excellence.

In general, then, the late Ming music connoisseurs' feverish aesthetic inclination towards vocal music, regarding the voice as a uniquely powerful agent of emotion, significantly contributed to the prominence of "pure singing" as a performance style in the private entertainment arena. When a courtesan sang, the audience anticipated being enchanted by her melodious voice, while accompanying instruments – if present at all – were expected to serve as foils to that voice, contributing by accentuating its inherent qualities.

3.3 Lively Atmospheres: Performances at Large Public Gatherings

Banqueting and drinking events are a recurring theme in Ming era texts, replete with vivid descriptions of lavish scenes of extravagance, typically involving the serving of wine and musical performances by courtesans. In such contexts, the soundscapes were often bustling and noisy, filled with a variety of sounds in addition to people's voices: the clinking of glasses full of wine, the sounds of gaming and laughter, a succession of sounds of chatting and flirting, and cheers over the performance. The female performers had to adapt to these lively atmospheres, even if the music they earnestly performed ended up serving as a backdrop to the banquet. In fact, the ability to deliver a compelling musical performance amidst a noisy, happening context was one of the essential skills for Ming period courtesans.

The first type of performance context to be discussed here is that of the large public gathering. Courtesans were a regular presence at Ming era open-access assembly and festival, where they were hired or invited to provide various forms of entertainment. It is to be expected that the surroundings of such a gathering, open to almost all passers-by, would have been characterized by a boisterous environment, filled with booze and food, performances, recreational activities, and other kinds of amusement and stimulants. Predecessors of such

public gatherings can be traced back to the feasting and travelling activities of the literati during the Wei, Jin and Northern dynasties.²²⁵

By the Ming dynasty, it had become a social custom for the literati to hold regular large-scale gatherings with a variety of themes and contents, including debates on current political affairs, evaluating courtesans according to their appearances and talents, or symposia on painting, writing poetry, and composing new lyrics to existing tunes. These gatherings, sometimes involving thousands of participants, were particularly popular during the late Ming dynasty and gradually disappeared during the Qing dynasty.²²⁶ Through these experiences, the Ming audiences developed particular listening habits and expectations, wherein the courtesans' musical performance constituted but one component – and often a background component – within a bustling sonic environment.²²⁷

From surveying the Ming period sources, I have identified three distinct forms of large gathering at which the Ming period courtesans performed, which will be explored in sequence below: gatherings for the evaluation of courtesans, gatherings of literati associations, and festive gatherings.

Organised by literati, the public activity of evaluating courtesans was commonly known as *pinhua* 品花 (“flower tasting”, means to evaluate courtesans), and it is thought to have originated in the Song dynasty.²²⁸ This practice was reminiscent of modern-day beauty

²²⁵ For example, Cao Pi 曹丕 (187-226) wrote the following poem: “When we used to gather and travel together, sedan chairs were attached to one another when we went out, and the seats remained connected when we rested, so we were never separated from each other for a moment. Whenever we passed each other cups of wine, the string and wind instruments were played together, and when we were tipsy and merry, we tilted our heads and recited the poems we had just written. 昔日游处，行则连舆，止则接席，何曾须臾相失。每至觞酌流行，丝竹并奏，酒酣耳热，仰而赋诗。” In Cao Pi's *Letter to Wu Zhi* 与吴质书. From: Chen Shou and Pei Songzhi, *San'guo zhi* 三國志 [Three kingdoms], vol. 21 (Hongkong: Zhonghua Book Company, 1971), 608.

²²⁶ Xu Rui, "Ming Qing qinhuai qinglou yueji de yinyue huodong 明清秦淮青楼乐妓的音乐活动 [The musical activities of courtesans in the Ming and Qing dynasty Qinghuai brothels]," *Huang Zhong* 黄钟, no. 4 (2010): 73.

²²⁷ Peng Xu has discussed such lively and boisterous listening traditions in the Ming dynasty. See: Xu, "Courtesan vs. Literatus: Gendered Soundscapes and Aesthetics in Late-Ming Singing Culture," 405-06.

²²⁸ “Since all of Qiu's courtesans poured the wine on such occasions, Weng gained a thorough knowledge of their looks as well as of their artistic and musical talent. He therefore chose a flower to symbolize the characteristics of each. While his poems have their strengths and weaknesses, each is founded on reality...Wu Ji: Red Plum Blossoms (alluding to her being queen of all the flowers due to incomparable purity)...” See: Ye Luo, *The Drunken Man's Talk: Tales from Medieval China*, trans. Alister D. Inglis (Seattle and London:

pageants, with literati playing the role of judges and meticulously assessing each courtesan who took part in the proceedings. Centring on courtesans active in the same region, the events involved the systematic judging and ranking of their characteristics and qualities, encompassing their physical appearances, literary and artistic talents, temperaments and conduct. Each courtesan on the list would be given a unique flower name to symbolize her characteristics, and those deemed the most admirable were often celebrated via the medium of poetry. For example, the Ming era literati poetry collection *Wu Ji Bai Mei* (addressed in Chapter 2) was a product of such courtesan evaluation activities.

In his later years, the early Qing period scholar Yu Huai 余怀 (1616-1695) recorded in *Banqiao Zaji* 板桥杂记 (Miscellaneous Records of the Plank Bridge) what he had witnessed and experienced of Nanjing's glorious courtesan culture in the late Ming period. In the third volume "Anecdotes", Yu recounts the extravagant public events of courtesan selection sponsored by Yao Beiruo 姚北若 and Shen Yuruo 沈雨若, both natives of Jiaxing.²²⁹ These events welcomed literati-candidates from all districts to partake in the imperial examination. Much of the celebration took place in boats, with four courtesans employed for each boat, to serve drinks and provide other entertainment. Meanwhile, the courtesan houses lining the embankments of the Qinhuai River acted as other key venues. These courtesan houses were intricately woven into the commercial and residential districts of Ming era Nanjing, mainly situated in the bustling downtown districts, and therefore differing markedly from the Edo period (1603-1868) Japanese brothels of Yoshiwara, which were located in the suburbs, separated from the city by a river.²³⁰

One of the most renowned Ming era gatherings for courtesan evaluation was the *Liantai Xianhui* 莲台仙会 (Gathering of Immortals at Lotus Terrace), orchestrated by various

University of Washington Press, 2015), 58.

²²⁹ "Yao Beiruo of Jiaxing used twelve storied boats for revelry at Qinhuai. He gathered about a hundred well-known men of letters who had come from all over the realm to take the examination. For each boat, he invited four famous courtesans to encourage the drinking with the company. With a troupe from the Pear Garden, the flames of lanterns, and the music and songs, it was a grand affair unmatched in its time. Some time earlier, Shen Yuruo of Jiaxing spent a thousand taels to settle the rankings of "flower cases," and people in Jiangnan spoke about it with envy and admiration. 嘉兴姚北若, 用十二楼船于秦淮, 招集四方应试知名之士百余人, 每船邀名妓四人侑酒, 梨园一部, 灯火笙歌, 为一时之盛事。先是, 嘉兴沈雨若费千金定花案, 江南艳称之。" Li Wai-yee translation. See: Yu Huai, "Miscellaneous Records of the Plank Bridge 板桥杂记 [1693]," 154.

²³⁰ Screech, "Going to the Courtesans: Transit to the Pleasure District of Edo Japan," 255-56.

literati, including the eminent *sanqu* specialist Cao Dazhang 曹大章 (1520-1575), in 1570.²³¹ Emulating both the imperial examination and a beauty pageant, dozens of courtesans were appraised and ranked, the final fourteen laureates were granted scholarly titles, mirroring those of the real imperial examinations, albeit with the addition of a female prefix: female academician 女学士, female court historian 女太史, number one female scholar 女状元, number two female scholar 女榜眼, and so forth. The collection of biographies and novels by the playwright Pan Zhiheng 潘之恒 (1536-1621), entitled *Geng Shi Chao* 亘史钞 (The Seamless History), chronicles this gathering as follows:

金坛曹公家居多逸豫，恣情美艳。隆庆庚午，结客秦淮，有莲台之会。……品藻诸妓，一时之盛，嗣后绝响。²³²

The household of the revered Mr Cao in Jintan County had a spirit of idleness and pleasure, indulging in beautiful and dazzling courtesans all the time. In the Gengwu year of the Longqing period (1567-1572), Cao invited the guests to gather in the Qinhuai area for a get-together at the Lotus Terrace... They evaluated and ranked the courtesans. It was such a spectacular event, the likes of which would never be experienced again.

In his account of this magnificent event, entitled *Qinhuai Nüshi Biao* 秦淮士女表 (The Register of Maidens in Qinhuai), Cao Dazhang records the names of the participating courtesans. In the introduction, he expresses his dissatisfaction with the contemporary rosters of courtesans, explaining that it compelled him to organise the evaluation event.²³³ He also

²³¹ Chen Menglei, "Bowu huibian yishu dian 博物汇编·艺术典 [Encyclopedia of natural history · art canon]," in *Gujin tushu jicheng* 古今图书集成 [Ancient and modern books collection] (Shanghai: Zhonghua Book Company, 1934), 90.

²³² From the entry "Gathering of Immortals at Lotus Terrace" (*liantai xianhui* 莲台仙会). Pan Zhiheng, "Gengshi chao 亘史钞 [Chronicles of extensive history]," in *Siku Quanshu Series* 四库全书存目丛书 [Complete books of the four imperial repositories] (Taipei: Taiwan Commercial Press, 1997), 522.

²³³ "I once read the *Famous Courtesans and Flower Spectrum in Jinling* and, for courtesans ranking lower than Wang Baonu, they were each given a poem and, although apt in content, the style of writing was not elegant enough. I have also read the *Records of the Twelve Beauties and Collation of Books*, which was likewise unsatisfactory. These were not all that I have read, and the rest of the poorly written articles were as annoying as the noise of frogs and cicadas. For my works to be compared with theirs would be an offence and disparagement to me, as if comparing the ugly girl Wuyan with the famous beauty Xishi, very detestable.

delineates the criteria for ranking, appearing to concur with the Song era literati Su Shi 苏轼 (1037-1101) and Qin Guan 秦观 (1049-1100) by prioritising the courtesans' temperaments and tastes, then placing a little less weight on their talents and skills, and lastly, considering their appearance:

子瞻与少游论妓，定以情兴为上，才技次之，丰姿为下，兹亦其遗意乎？²³⁴

When Su Shi and Qin Guan discussed courtesans, they believed that emotional appeal was of the utmost importance, followed by talent and skills, with physical attractiveness being the least significant. This is their remaining message, isn't it?

Although many specific details are missing from these reports, one can still make deductions about what was happening in the pleasure district on the riverfront four hundred years ago: a total of fourteen courtesans featured on the final list, indicating that there must have been dozens of courtesans vying in the competition. Thus, the number of participants must have been considerable – also encompassing judges, aficionados of leisure culture, servants, and passers-by. Although talent is said to have been of secondary importance in the evaluation, it was undeniably a vital criterion. The judgment of emotional appeal and physical attractiveness could be conducted merely through dialogues and visual assessment of physical attributes, hinging significantly on the judges' personal aesthetic inclinations. Talent, in contrast, could be relatively fairly assessed — albeit not wholly exempt from personal bias — and would have necessitated the contestants to showcase their diligently honed skills.²³⁵ In

Recently I have been here because of some matters, hoping to purge the crudity that has collected over recent years. However, I didn't find the purport of the article I wanted to write. By chance, I saw a friend write a commentary on the *Shishuo Xinyu*, and it touched my heart, so I wrote this work. 曾见《金陵名姬分花谱》，自王宝奴以下，凡若而人，各缀一词，切而不雅。《十二钗女校书录》，差强人意。未尽，当家余子纷纷蛙鸣蝉噪，刻画无盐，唐突西子，殊为可恨。顷余有事于此，将欲一洗晚近之陋，未得雅宗。偶见友人表《世说新语》，有触于衷，引而为此。” Chen Menglei, "Bowu huibian yishu dian 博物汇编·艺术典 [Encyclopedia of natural history · art canon]," in *Gujin tushu jicheng* 古今图书集成 [Ancient and modern books collection] (Shanghai: Zhonghua Book Company, 1934), 90.

²³⁴ Chen Menglei, "Bowu huibian yishu dian 博物汇编·艺术典 [Encyclopedia of natural history · art canon]," 90.

²³⁵ Regarding the aspects of concern when evaluating courtesans in the Ming dynasty, see Shen Hongyu's 沈弘宇 *Piao Du Ji Guan* 嫖赌机关 (Prostitution and Gambling Mechanisms) in the section "Observing the ten perfections of sisters" 观姊妹之十全. The evaluation of a courtesan should focus on her "elegance,

this case, a majority of courtesans would have likely demonstrated musical talents, including singing, to captivate the music-enthusiast judges. The gathering was possibly protracted, potentially spanning several days, given that the competition entailed witnessing dozens of contestants exhibiting their talents. It is conceivable that during the courtesans' performances, a medley of sounds would have permeated the air, such as the clinking of glasses, the chatter and laughter of the audience, the gentle lap of waves against the embankment, and perhaps even the nocturnal chirping of insects.²³⁶

Another type of large public gathering was the assembly of literati societies. These gatherings often served a political purpose, uniting literati with similar political ambitions. Yet the core activities of these events typically involved banqueting, enjoying musical performances, and partaking in various other forms of entertainment. A representative example of such literati association gatherings was the *fushe* 复社 (Revival Society) gathering in the late Ming period.²³⁷ The number of attendees could reach several thousand, as recorded by Jin Jifen 金嗣芬 in the *Banqiao Zaji Bu* 板桥杂记补 (Supplement to Miscellaneous Records of the Plank Bridge): "...Songs were called for with glasses filled with wine. The fellow members of the *fushe* gathering gathered on the Qinhuai River, nearly two thousand people. 载酒征歌。大会复社同盟于秦淮河上，几二千人。"²³⁸

Another depiction of this event can be found in *Tao An Meng Yi* 陶庵夢忆 (Dreaming of Memories in the Tao Study, written between 1644 and 1775), a collection of miscellanea

refinement, calligraphy and painting skills, artistry, singing, instrumental music, clarity, style, propriety, and sophistication. 文雅、脱俗、翰墨、技艺、歌唱、丝竹、泾渭、风情、停当、苏样。” Shen Hongyu, *Piao du ji guan ming kanben* 嫖赌机关 明刻本 [Newly published prostitution and gambling mechanisms, Ming edition], Ming dynasty, 2 volumes, ltf58021227, Library of Congress.

²³⁶ Xu, "Courtesan vs. Literatus: Gendered Soundscapes and Aesthetics in Late-Ming Singing Culture," 405-06.

²³⁷ The Revival Society (复社 *Fushe*) emerged as a literary movement during the Ming dynasty, embodying distinct political motives. Initiated in 1628 by Wu Zeng 吴翊, Sun Mengpu 孙孟朴, and Sun Chun 孙淳, the society aimed to discard the rigid eight-legged essay format (*baguwen* 八股文) prevalent in state examinations, and to reinstate literary forms and styles from earlier eras. See: Hu Xiaowei, "Fushe 复社 [The revival society]," in *Zhongguo da baike quanshu zhongguo wenxue* 中国大百科全书 中国文学 [Encyclopedia of China: Chinese Literature] (Beijing; Shanghai: Encyclopedia of China Publishing House 中国大百科全书出版社, 1986), 160.

²³⁸ Jin Sifen, *Banqiao zaji bu* 板桥杂记补 [Supplement to miscellaneous records of the plank bridge], Nanjing Rare Books Series 南京稀见文献丛刊, (Nanjing: Nanjing Publishing House, 2006), 120.

penned by the late Ming dramatist Zhang Dai 张岱 (1597-1689). Zhang Dai meticulously documents every facet of the gathering, providing information on the time, the identities of the attendees, the location, and the various musical activities that unfolded throughout the night:

虎邱八月半，土著流寓、士夫眷属、女乐声伎、曲中名妓戏婆、民间少妇好女、崽子耍童及游冶恶少、清客帮闲、僮童走空之辈，无不鳞集。自……下至试剑石、一二山门，皆铺毡席地坐，登高望之，如雁落平沙，霞铺江上。天暝月上，鼓吹百十处，大吹大擂，十番饶钹，渔阳掺挝，动地翻天，雷轰鼎沸，呼叫不闻。更定，鼓饶渐歇，丝管繁兴，杂以歌唱，皆「锦帆开澄湖万顷」同场大曲，蹲踏和锣丝竹肉声，不辨拍煞。更深，人渐散去，士夫眷属皆下船水嬉，席席征歌，人人献技，南北杂之，管弦迭奏，听者方辨句字，藻鉴随之。二鼓人静，悉屏管弦，洞箫一缕，哀涩清绵，与肉相引，尚存三四，迭更为之。三鼓，月孤气肃，人皆寂阒，不杂蚊虻。一夫登场，高坐石上，不箫不拍，声出如丝，裂石穿云，串度抑扬，一字一刻，听者寻入针芥，心血为枯，不敢击节，惟有点头。然此时雁比而坐者，犹存百十人焉。使非苏州，焉讨识者！²³⁹

At the Mid-Autumn Festival in Huqiu, locals and visitors of Suzhou, scholars and their relatives, female musicians and singing girls, famous courtesans and drama actresses, young women and daughters of ordinary families, children and pretty young men, as well as prodigal sons and ruffians, proteges and hangers-on, servants and swindlers, all gathered in Huqiu. From the upper-most places... down to the sword-testing stone, the first mountain gate and the second mountain gate, all of them were covered with carpet, and people sat on the ground. Climbing up to a high place to view from afar, the people looked like scattered geese landed on a flat beach, and the rosy clouds were spreading on the river. When it was dark and the moon was up, there were a hundred or more places where drums were beaten and songs were sung. The sound of drums and cymbals was extremely loud, and the sound of the ten-drum ensemble seemed able to shake the earth and overturn the sky, like rumbling thunder and boiling

²³⁹ Zhang Dai, *Tao an meng yi xi hu meng xun* 陶庵梦忆 西湖梦寻 [Dreaming of memories in the Tao study; searching for dreams at the West Lake] (1775; 1671) (Changsha: Hunan Yuelu Publishing House), 61.

water, so even people's calls and shouts could not be heard. From eight to nine in the evening, the drums and cymbals gradually stopped, but the wind and stringed instruments became more and more lively, interspersed with the sound of singing, and everyone sang the chorus of the song beginning with the line "the boat with brocade sails drifts away, and the crystal-clear lake water is vast". The crowd noise, gongs, string and wind music, and singing sounds intertwined, making it difficult to distinguish the rhythm and beat. Late at night, the crowd gradually dispersed, and the scholars and their families played on the boat, every table singing, and everyone competing to present their skills, the southern and northern music styles mixing together, and wind and stringed instruments playing one after another. As soon as the audience recognised the lyrics, they began to appreciate and comment on them. From nine to eleven o'clock, the crowd quietened, and the music of the strings and winds also ceased, leaving only the strain of a *xiao* bamboo pipe, mournful and rough, yet lingering in the air beautifully, in harmony with the singing voice. There were still three or four places where such music was played, the singing and the playing happening alternately. By midnight, the moon hung lonely in the sky, the air was chilly, the voices were silenced, and even the cacophony of mosquitoes and gadflies had disappeared. Then a man appeared and sat high on a rock, without the accompaniment of a pipe or any beat, and his voice sounded like a floating gossamer at first, but suddenly turned as strong as a cracking stone, seeming to penetrate the clouds as he sang in a rhythmic and melodious manner, one word after another. The listeners immediately felt the beauty of the song's nuances and were so moved that their spirits were infatuated and hearts seemed to be drained of blood, and they dared not applaud or cheer, but only nodded their heads vigorously. However, at that time there were still a hundred or so people sitting neatly like rows of geese. If not in Suzhou, where else could one see such a sight?

This detailed passage records the sequence of activities that took place, demonstrating that they were remarkably varied in nature, seeking to appeal to diverse attendees with diverse social backgrounds and distinct identities. Music commenced immediately after sunset, beginning with the vibrant percussion performance (such as drums and gongs), energizing the

audience, and creating a lively atmosphere. By eight to nine o'clock in the evening, the sound of percussion had subsided, giving way to the melodic sounds of wind and string instruments with singing. At this time, the atmosphere remained bustling and noisy, with attendees fully immersed in the revelry of the early night. As the night progressed, the crowd dispersed to engage in separate entertainment activities. Some opted for boat trips and games, while others remained at the banquet to showcase their musical talents, often singing in unison with the courtesans. The repertoires and styles employed in the performances were also diverse in nature, with songs from both southern and northern traditions featuring. Before the night fell completely, the idlers departed, leaving behind the gentle melodies of *xiao* flutes and soft singing. The performers were likely presenting southern-style songs, as the combination of *xiao* and vocals is a common characteristic of southern *qu* performance. The performance continued till around midnight.

The last type of large public gathering at which courtesans regularly performed was the public festival. A quintessential example was the “Hamper Party” (盒子会 *hezi hui*), a popular festival among Ming era Nanjing courtesans. As documented in *Banqiao Zaji* 板桥杂记 (Miscellaneous Records of the Plank Bridge), beautiful and talented courtesans, numbering dozens and representing up to 30 different surnames, would assemble during the Lantern Festival (the fifteenth day of the first lunar month). Each courtesan would bring her own delicacies and exquisite utensils, and participants included some of the courtesans’ client-lovers. The festival was centered around the display and competitive evaluation of dishes, complemented by drinking activities and intermittent musical performances.²⁴⁰

²⁴⁰ “...They drink through the night, and the party lasts for a full month before ending. At the feasts they arrange the lights and play music, each displaying her skills and talents...Hampers go back and forth as each competes with her lovely neighbours; with handkerchiefs as tokens, feelings deepen and they become sisters. House on the east, house on the west, a hundred silken-mesh flourishes; they fill in the dishes and the fruit; spring delicacies overflow. Leopard placentas are mixed with crispy sturgeon cartilage on ice, black olives are combined with raw coconut, white as jade. Pay no heed to the abundance; give credit only to rarities. For items falling short in ranking, the rule is to compensate with wine. Parading instruments of string and wind, they delight in the meeting of hearts. Collecting cash and gold, friends of shared sentiments come and go. From the time of spring wind, excitement in the hall lasts for a month, among the flowers are the scent of wine and snatches of conversations. The same peach and pear blossoms in three thousand households, yet there are forlorn ones on the other side of the walls. [Li Wai-yee translation]” Yu Huai, “Miscellaneous Records of the Plank Bridge 板桥杂记 [1693],” 177-78.

Some public festival gatherings also included courtesan evaluation. For example, a festival gathering was held on the Double Seventh Festival at Qinhuai area, as recorded in *Banqiao Zaji* 板桥杂记 (Miscellaneous Records of the Plank Bridge):

己卯岁牛女渡河之夕，大集诸姬于方密之侨居水阁，四方贤豪，车骑盈闾巷，梨园子弟，三班骈演，阁外环列舟航如堵墙。品藻花案，设立层台，以坐状元。二十余人中，考微波第一，登台奏乐，进金屈卮。南曲诸姬皆色沮，渐逸去。天明始罢酒。次日，各赋诗纪其事。

In the Jimao year (1639), on Double Seventh, the night when the Weaver Maid Star and the Cowherd Star crossed the River of Heaven, he hosted a grand gathering of various courtesans at the quayside house where Fang Yizhi was sojourning. Carriages and horses of worthy and distinguished men from everywhere filled the streets. As for the denizens of Pear Garden, three troupes performed side by side. Outside the house, boats were arrayed in a circle like a wall. The “flower cases” were evaluated according to their excellence, and a tiered terrace was set up as a seat for the top graduate.

Among the twenty or so ladies, the examiners placed Weibo first. She ascended to the terrace as music struck up and was presented with a wine cup. The various courtesans of the South Bend all looked disconsolate and gradually drifted away. The drinking did not stop until daybreak. On the following day, we each composed poems to record the event.²⁴¹ [Li Wai-yee translation]

This description stresses the vast scale of the event and, again, the diversity of its activities, including the ranking of courtesans, drinking, and poetry writing. Such activities encapsulated the essence of festival celebration while also serving as an open contest for courtesans, orchestrated by the region’s literati.

²⁴¹ Yu Huai, "Miscellaneous Records of the Plank Bridge 板桥杂记 [1693]," 142.

3.4 Exclusive Enjoyment: Performances at Private Gatherings

The main points of distinction between large public assemblies (as discussed above) and private gatherings exclusively for invited participants were the scale, number of attendees, and openness of the event. Whereas the former typically welcomed individuals from all walks of life and potentially accommodated hundreds of attendees, the latter were not open to the public and involved only a limited number of participants. Amongst the Ming literati, it was customary to convene one's contemporaries for private banquets and drinking soirees, cementing one's social group by providing shared experiences characterised by many different forms of interaction. Here, it was usually desirable to employ musically adept performers such as courtesans and singing girls and boys, to cater to and entertain the attendees. Such events could transpire in a variety of settings, ranging from private indoor locations like residences and exclusive banquet halls, to semi-open spaces like terraces and gardens, as well as outdoor environments such as seasonal excursions and boat rides.

As documented in *Wanli Ye Huo Bian* 万历野获编 (A Collection of Unofficial Histories of the Wanli Period), in the twenty-seventh year of Hongwu's reign (1394), five official banqueting establishments in the Jiangnan area were “dedicated to the placement of drink-serving singing courtesans 专以处侑酒歌妓者,”²⁴² highlighting the prominence of courtesans in such social gatherings. The following is a quintessential depiction of a courtesan house, excerpted from the acclaimed memoirs of Qing era literati Yu Huai 余怀 (1616-1695), chronicling the late Ming Nanjing brothel culture in *Banqiao Zaji* 板桥杂记 (Miscellaneous Records of the Plank Bridge):

妓家鳞次，比屋而居，屋宇精洁，花木萧疏，迥非尘境。到门则铜环半启，珠箔低垂；升阶则猫儿吠客，鹦哥唤茶；登堂则假母肃迎，分宾抗礼；进轩则丫鬟毕妆，捧艳而出；坐久则水陆备至，丝肉竞陈；定情则目眺心挑，绸缪宛转，纨绔少年，绣肠才子，无不魂迷色阵，气尽雌风矣。

²⁴² Shen Defu, *Wanli ye huo bian* 万历野获编 [A collection of unofficial histories of the Wanli period], 900.

The (courtesan) houses were tasteful and meticulously clean, gracefully laced with flowers and vegetation. This was truly the opposite of the mundane realm of dust and grime. Reach the entrance and the gates with copper rings would open, while pearly curtains hung low. Go up the steps and pet dogs would bark at the guests, and parrots would call for tea. Ascend the hall and the madam would respectfully welcome you and conduct rituals proper for hosts and guests. Enter the court and the maid would have finished applying makeup for the beauty; she would emerge followed by her maid. Sit long enough and all manner of delicacies would arrive and various tunes and songs would strike up. Reach an understanding and her gaze would stir your heart, and tender feelings would deepen. Privileged young men in silken garments, talented scholars gifted with refined words — they were without exception lost in this battle formation of sensual beauty and gave up their spirit to the female sway.²⁴³ [Li Wai-ye translation]

This locale was characterized by its intimate, feminine ambiance, dominated by the courtesan-hostess. The opulent and refined setting exuded an air of transcendence from the mundane, juxtaposed with a myriad of sensuous elements designed to captivate and enchant: aromatic flora, pearl curtains, barking puppies and chirping parrots, the cordiality of the senior madam and maids, the allure of exquisitely adorned beauties with gentle, communicative gazes, delectable cuisine, and an eclectic assortment of musical performances and songs. All these components synergistically fostered a relaxing and indulgent atmosphere. The courtesan houses are depicted as sanctuaries of sensory delights, where the entrancing milieu gave guests the illusory perception that, by stepping into this realm, they were absolved from the ethical mores of traditional domestic life and societal obligations, as also observed by He Yuming.²⁴⁴ The guests could easily get lost in all the elements this space offered, such as the sophisticated and luxurious décor that resonated with the literati's aesthetic sensibilities, as well as the undivided attention and the tender emotional support proffered by the courtesan.

²⁴³ Yu Huai, "Miscellaneous Records of the Plank Bridge 板桥杂记 [1693]," 71.

²⁴⁴ He, "Productive space: Performance texts in the late Ming," 29. He, "Productive space: Performance texts in the late Ming," 29.

The descriptions presented in Ming period sources suggest that hosts typically went to great lengths to evoke an air of exclusivity, where each attendee was made to feel special. Of course, the guests to this private domain (be it private residence or courtesan house) were carefully selected, and the courtesan performers were likewise chosen to suit the occasion – thereby heightening the impression of exclusivity. This accentuation of specialness aimed to create a delineation between the private sphere and the public domain, and facilitate a mental shift for the attendees, enabling them to detach from the monotony of daily life and immerse themselves in a luxurious realm of pleasure. However, it is imperative to clarify that exclusivity and privacy did not necessarily imply a total isolation from public spaces. During the Ming period, many brothels in the Jiangnan area were situated in central urban locations, often within audible proximity to musical performances emanating from courtesan houses. An illustrative example can be found in Feng Menglong’s short story “Yutangchun Reunites with Her Husband in Her Distress”, wherein the protagonist approaches the entrance of a brothel and “suddenly hears delicate singing voices raised from different courtyards 忽听歌声别院娇”.²⁴⁵ Similarly, *Banqiao Zaji* 板桥杂记 (Miscellaneous Records of the Plank Bridge) provides an embellished description of the courtesan house setting: “By noon the aroma of orchids, jasmine, and exquisite incense could be traced for miles. With the advent of evening, the sounds of those playing the flutes, plucking the zithers, or singing in dramatic performance penetrated the Nine Heavens. 停午乃兰花茉莉，沉水甲煎，馨闻数里；入夜而擘笛撈箏，梨园搬演，声彻九霄。”²⁴⁶ These examples underscore the fact that it was the secrecy and exclusivity associated with courtesans’ performance and hedonism that appealed to clients, rather than what I choose to term “acoustic privacy”.

²⁴⁵ Translated by the current author. Feng Menglong, *Stories to Caution the World* 警世通言 [1624], 379. In this version, the quoted sentence was translated as “singing voices rise above the halls”.

²⁴⁶ Yu Huai, "Miscellaneous Records of the Plank Bridge 板桥杂记 [1693]," 72.

3.4.1 Singing and Instrumental Ensembles

Inviting small ensembles of courtesans to perform at private banquets was a prevalent practice amongst Ming era upper-middle-class patrons. The courtesans' group performances were often presentational in nature. Involving minimal performer/audience interaction, they offered guests the option to immerse themselves fully in the performance or simply enjoy it as ambient music complementing their drinking activities. Ensemble performances were commonly employed in this way as a means of colouring the prevailing mood. An example from *Banqiao Zaji* 板桥杂记 (Miscellaneous Records of the Plank Bridge) portrays a typical scene at such an intimate gathering, featuring Xu Qingjun 徐青君, the son of the Lord of Zhongshan, although it lacks a detailed account of the musical performance:

每当夏月，置宴河房，日选名妓四、五人，邀宾侑酒。木瓜、佛手，堆积如山；茉莉、珠兰，芳香似雪。夜以继日，恒酒酣歌……

Whenever the summer months came around, he hosted feasts at the river houses, choosing four or five famous courtesans every day to entice the guests and to encourage drinking. Quinces and Buddha's hands were piled up in mounds; jasmines and aglaia were snow white and fragrant. Nights followed days in endless rounds of drinking and exhilarated singing.²⁴⁷ [Li Wai-yee translation]

The subsequent example from the short fiction "Regional Commander Zheng Renders Distinguished Service with His Divine-Arm Bow" provides further details about the intimate seating arrangements prevalent at private indoor gatherings, where the courtesans were seated adjacent to the clients. Here, the principal guest is attended to by the most esteemed courtesan, while each of the remaining guests is accompanied by a courtesan to serve drinks:

那众员外和王倩再三相留，员外不得已，只得就席，和王行首并坐。众员外身边一家一个妓弟，便教整顿酒来。

²⁴⁷ Yu Huai, "Miscellaneous Records of the Plank Bridge 板桥杂记 [1693]," 159.

However, at the insistence of his friends and Wang Qian, he (Squire Zhang) sat down next to Courtesan Wang against his own inclinations. With one courtesan little brother next to every man, they set to drinking.²⁴⁸ [Shuhui Yang and Yunqin Yang translation]

It is worth highlighting the term “courtesan little brother” (妓弟 *ji di*) in the above example. This hermaphroditic appellation, incorporating a male suffix, partially substantiates the courtesans’ peripheral ambiguity within the marital system and family norms of the Ming era. Occasionally, within the pleasure realm, guests exhibited willingness to integrate the courtesans into the literati circle – which was traditionally regarded as a male domain – thereby facilitating uninhibited discussions on topics deemed taboo within domestic confines.

Another exemplification of the seating arrangements at private gatherings is documented in *Tao’an Mengyi* 陶庵梦忆 (Dream Memories in the Tao study) by the Ming era literatus Zhang Dai 张岱 (1597-1684). Here, a prosperous merchant organizes a sumptuous drinking banquet and “invites a dozen or so courtesans from the entertainment venue, people gathering to joke, tease, and laugh with one another, and sitting around [the table] indulging in drinking 集曲中妓十数人，群淬嘻笑，环坐纵饮。”²⁴⁹ A similar seating arrangement is described in Pan Zhiheng’s 潘之恒 *Yan Qiuji Zhuan* 杨璆姬传 (Biography of Yang Qiu Ji): “By chance, I was invited to a banquet one night, just outside Qinhuai, and, on the way there, met up with an old friend and some young boys with several courtesans having a drinking party. I was invited to sit closely with them... 偶夜被酒，出秦淮，道中有故人从少年挟诸姬饮。引与密坐.....”²⁵⁰

A more detailed depiction of the musical scenes at a private gathering is narrated in *Jin Ping Mei* 金瓶梅 (The Plum in the Golden Vase), where the male protagonist’s neighbour, Hua Zi Xu 花子虚, hosts an extravagant party at his residence, inviting a group of friends:

²⁴⁸ Feng Menglong, *Stories to Awaken the World* 醒世恒言 [1627], 735. The original translation for the term *ji di* 妓弟 is “one woman”; I change it into “courtesan little brother” according to the literal translation.

²⁴⁹ Zhang Dai, *Tao an meng yi xi hu meng xun* 陶庵梦忆 西湖梦寻 [Dreaming of memories in the Tao study; searching for dreams at the West Lake], 92.

²⁵⁰ Pan Zhiheng, *Pan zhiheng quhua* 潘之恒曲话 [Words on Pan Zhiheng’s qu], 107-08.

……一个粉头，两个妓女，琵琶箏阮，在席前弹唱。

「……歌喉宛转，声如枝上流莺；舞态蹁跹，影似花间凤转。腔依古调，音出天然。舞回明月坠秦楼，歌遏行云遮楚馆。…」

少顷，酒过三巡，歌吟两套……

…A performer with a painted face and two other singing girls were there to entertain them, playing a *pipa*, a psaltery, and a mandola, and singing in front of the gathering… The sound of their singing is melodious; their voices are like the warbling of orioles as they sport upon the branch. The style of their dancing is fastidious; their postures resemble the pacing of phoenixes as they move among the flowers. Their tunes adhere to classic standards; their music has the air of spontaneity. Their dancing waylays the bright moon into shining on the pleasure-houses of Ch'in; their singing diverts the moving clouds into hovering atop the bordellos of Ch'u…

After a little while, when: Three rounds of wine had been consumed; and two suites of songs had been performed.²⁵¹ [David Tod Roy translation]

There are three performers in this episode, including an opera performer and two singing girls, who render their songs accompanied by wood clappers and various plucked stringed instruments – *pipa*, *zheng* zither, and *ruan* mandola. The passage portrays a refined musical performance characterized by singing voices reminiscent of orioles' chirping, elegant gestures, and dances augmenting the music. The proficiency of these courtesans in their musical rendition is discernible, with the closing sentence implying that the performance was interspersed with continuous indulgence in alcohol.

3.4.2 The Pure Joy of Singing

In certain instances, the guests at private gatherings exhibited a preference for a solo performance by a specific courtesan, thereby centralizing the audience's focus on one

²⁵¹ David Tod Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume One: The Gathering*, Princeton Library of Asian Translations, (Princeton, New Jersey, and Chichester, West Sussex: Princeton University Press, 1993), 216-17.

performer. This is exemplified in the short story “Secretary Qian Leaves Poems on the Swallow Tower”, which portrays the courtesan Guan Panpan captivating the guests, who had grown weary of the incessant drinking and group choral and dance performances, with her impeccable *pipa* solo:

当时酒至数巡，食供两套，歌喉少歇，舞袖亦停。忽有一妓，抱胡琴立于筵前，转袖调弦，独奏一曲，纤手斜拈，轻敲慢按。满座清香消酒力，一庭雅韵爽烦襟。须臾弹彻韶音，抱胡琴侍立。

After several rounds of wine and two food courses, the singing came to a halt, and the sleeves of the dancers stopped waving. There emerged in front of the feast table a courtesan holding a *pipa* in her arms. After tuning the instrument, she began playing solo, her dainty fingers gently tapping, pressing, and plucking at the strings. A delicate fragrance dispelled the effects of the wine, and the refined notes of the music dissolved all worries. In a short while, she stopped playing and stepped to one side, her *pipa* in her arms.²⁵² [Shuhui Yang and Yunqin Yang translation]

In addition to instrumental solo performances, another popular performance model at private gatherings was for courtesans to sit alongside guests at the same table, singing while enjoying wine. This singing often included minimal instrumental accompaniment, such as strings (like the *pipa*) or simple percussion (such as wood clappers), or could be completely unaccompanied. The repertoire typically consisted of popular *xiaoqu*, *sanqu*, or drama excerpts as requested by the clients.²⁵³ The following two illustrations from Ming era sources depict typical settings for courtesans’ singing performances at private gatherings:

²⁵² Feng Menglong, *Stories to Caution the World* 警世通言 [1624], 143.

²⁵³ Che Xilun and Liu Xiaojing, "Xiaochang kao ‘小唱’ 考 [On discussion of xiaochang]," 168.



Figure 3.1: *Ge* 歌 “Singing”. From Gu Zhengyi 顾正谊 *Bai Yong Tu Pu* 百咏图谱 [Pictorial Catalogue of A Hundred Odes on Things], Hanji 漢籍 [Chinese books], Yamaguchi University Library.²⁵⁴

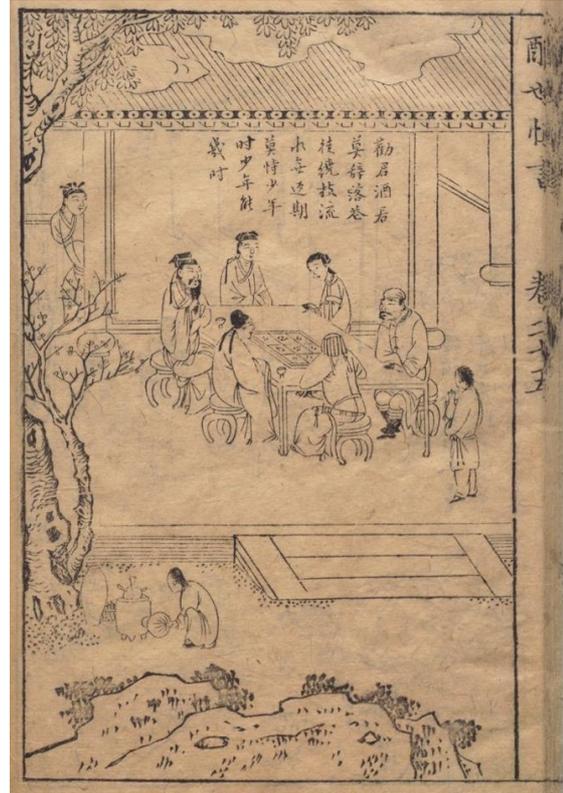


Figure 3.2: From Volume 25, “Mr. Dugu Has the Strangest Dreams on His Journey Home” 独孤生归途闹梦, in Feng Menglong, *Xing Shi Heng Yan* 醒世恒言 [Stories to Awaken the World]. Hanshu 漢書 [Chinese books], National Archives of Japan.²⁵⁵

The Figure 3.1 is from the poetry collection *Bai Yong Tu Pu* 百咏图谱 (Pictorial Catalogue of a Hundred Odes on Things) by the Ming scholar Gu Zhongfang 顾仲方. The Figure 3.2 is an illustration accompanying the short story “Mr. Dugu Has the Strangest Dreams on His Journey Home”, written by the Ming literatus Feng Menglong 冯梦龙. Both illustrations depict literati-organized private drinking parties, typically held in residences or banquet halls that were not open to the public. The environments are semi-open spaces near a backyard garden adorned with greenery and rockery, while the gatherings themselves are

²⁵⁴ Gu Zhengyi, *Bai yong tu pu* 百咏图谱 [Pictorial catalogue of a hundred odes on things], 1598, Hanji 漢籍 [Chinese books], 87, Yamaguchi University Library.

²⁵⁵ Feng Menglong, *Xing shi heng yan* 醒世恒言 [Stories to awaken the world], 1627, Hanshu 漢書 [Chinese books], 34, National Archives of Japan.

small-scale and intimate, with the guests seated around a four-sided table. In Figure 3.1, two additional courtesans are responsible for playing the *xiao* (third from the left) and providing accompaniment with clappers (fourth from the left), while two servant boys attend to serving food, and heating up and pouring the wine. The poem in this illustration, titled “Singing” (歌 *ge*), captures the essence of the courtesan’s solo vocal performance through rich metaphorical imagery.

子夜发新声，纤喉转曙莺。缓随飞雪度，娇送落花桎。
嫋嫋梁间绕，悠悠扇底生。周郎知不误，一顾似含情。²⁵⁶

Singing a new song at midnight, her soft voice turns like a warbler’s call at dawn.
Slowly it descends with the fluttering snowflakes, falling daintily like the falling petals.
Slender and delicate, it seems to go up to the rafters;
Slowly but surely, a subtle sentiment is rising behind the fan.
Mr Zhou knows he does not misunderstand, every glance she gives seems to exude tenderness.

Figure 3.2 (above) portrays a scene from Mr Dugu’s dream, in which his wife Bai-shi is coerced into singing and entertaining at a private drinking party attended by six men. In this scenario, the woman’s plight is analogous to that of courtesans who offered singing and companionship services. A distinguishing factor in this example is that it involves a solitary person performing in the pure singing style.

The poem inscribed on the wall in Figure 3.2 constitutes one of the song lyrics that the heroine Bai-shi performs, imploring the audience to savour their time and relish the drinking: “Have a cup of wine, do not turn me down. The falling petals linger in vain on the stems; the water flows on, never to return. Do not expect your youth to last long; all too quickly it will be gone! 劝君酒，君莫辞。落花徒绕枝，流水无迨期。莫恃少年时，少年能几时？”²⁵⁷

²⁵⁶ Gu Zhengyi, *Bai yong tu pu* 百咏图谱 [Pictorial catalogue of a hundred odes on things]: 87.

²⁵⁷ Feng Menglong, *Stories to Awaken the World* 醒世恒言 [1627], 579. Translated by Yang Shuhui and

The narrative then highlights some of the quintessential features of singing performances at private gatherings. Firstly, the performance is conducted in the pure singing style, complemented by simple rhythmical accompaniment. To be more specific, at the commencement of the banquet, the guests urge Bai-shi on, saying:

如此良辰美景，亦非易得，何苦恁般愁郁？请放开怀抱，欢饮一杯；并求妙音，以助酒情。

Such beautiful scenery and glorious weather are hard to come by. Why look so woebegone? Please let yourself go and happily drink a cup of wine. Please also sing a song for us, to add to the enjoyment.²⁵⁸ [Shuhui Yang and Yunqin Yang translation]

Reluctantly, Bai-shi decides to perform a song, the text recounting that she “wiped her eyes dry, took off her golden hairpin, and, beating time with it, sang the following song... 只得拭乾眼泪，拔下金雀钗，按板而歌。”²⁵⁹ In these private banqueting settings, any suitable item could be utilized as an ad-hoc rhythm provider, including chopsticks or a hairpin, or else people could simply clap their hands.

Additionally, the “Mr Dugu...” story suggests that the performance repertoire and style was often determined on the spot by the guests, with prompt adjustments made if the performance failed to meet their desires. After listening to Bai-shi’s singing, a young man offers his own evaluation and requests as follows:

「适来音调虽妙，但宾主正欢，歌恁样凄清之曲，恰是不称。如今求歌一曲有情趣的。」……白氏无可奈何，又歌一曲云：……白氏歌还未毕，那白面少年便嚷道：「方才讲过要个有情趣的，却故意唱恁般冷淡的声音。请监令罚一大杯。」

Yang Yunqin; the same below.

²⁵⁸ Feng Menglong, *Stories to Awaken the World* 醒世恒言 [1627], 578.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

A fair-complexioned young man, when it was his turn to offer a toast, said, “It was a good song all right, but such a melancholy tone is at great odds with the lively atmosphere around the table. Sing us a more cheerful song!” ...Resignedly Bai-shi sang again: ... Before she had finished, the fair-complexioned one cried out, “Didn’t I tell her to come up with a more cheerful song? And yet she purposefully sang a sad one! Penalize her with a large vessel!”²⁶⁰ [Shuhui Yang and Yunqin Yang translation]

As Bai-shi is about to accept the drink of forfeit, another guest suggests she sing another song:

大凡风月场中，全在帮衬，大家得趣。若十分苛罚，反觉我辈俗了。如今且权寄下这杯，待他另换一曲，可不是好。

In the courtesans’ quarters, everybody contributes to the fun. If we get too strict with the forfeits, we’ll be the vulgar ones spoiling the fun. Now keep the penalty in mind but let her sing another one. Won’t that be better?²⁶¹ [Shuhui Yang and Yunqin Yang translation]

Next, we read that, unwillingly, Bai-shi “forced herself to sing another song, (with) her tears flowing. 勉强挥泪又歌一曲.”²⁶²

And, finally, the story alludes to a third commonplace feature: at certain points in the proceedings, guests were welcome to (and probably expected to) adopt more active roles. Perhaps inevitably, they would interact with the singer (and with one another) through spoken and gestural feedback – and, typically, in the Ming era sources, we read of rapturous exclamations and hoots of approval, or melancholic responses tinged by the sadness of the songs.²⁶³ However, beyond the expression of personal response via interjections and post-

²⁶⁰ Feng Menglong, *Stories to Awaken the World* 醒世恒言 [1627], 579.

²⁶¹ Feng Menglong, *Stories to Awaken the World* 醒世恒言 [1627], 580.

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ For examples, “the profuse applauses around the table 满座无不称赞”, “(the audience) cheers (together) 众人齐声喝采”; “this song with its broken notes saddened everyone around the table 满座闻之，尽觉凄

performance feedback, participation also sometimes extended to guests undertaking a little music making themselves. Such role swapping with the courtesan must often have served as a major source of intrigue and fun. Accordingly, in the story, following Bai-shi's emotive vocal performance, a long-bearded guest volunteers to sing:

「我音律虽不甚妙，但礼无不答。信口诤一曲儿，回敬一杯。你们休要笑话。」
众人道：「你又几时进了这桩学问？快些唱来。」长须的顿开喉咙，唱道……

“I don't have much of a voice, but it's not polite not to do something in return. Let me improvise a song by way of a response. Don't laugh at me!”

“When did you ever learn this art? Go ahead and sing!” said his companions. Letting go of himself, the long-bearded one began to sing...²⁶⁴ [Shuhui Yang and Yunqin Yang translation]

He resolutely continues his performance despite the audience's mocking jeers in response to his less-than-harmonious voice:

那声音犹如哮喘，病老猫，把众人笑做一堆，连嘴都笑歪了，说道：「我说你晓得甚么歌曲。弄这样空头。」……长须人倒挣得好副老脸，但凭众人笑话，他却面不转色。直到唱完了，……

His voice was like that of a panting toad or a sick old cat. His companions all doubled over with laughter and their lips got all twisted out of shape. They commented, “We just knew you couldn't sing! Imagine fooling us like that!” The long-bearded man was a cheeky one. However boisterously the others laughed, he kept his composure and went on singing until he finished the song.²⁶⁵ [Shuhui Yang and Yunqin Yang translation]

然”. Feng Menglong, *Stories to Awaken the World* 醒世恒言 [1627], 579-81. Of course, unfortunately, we cannot observe the moment-by-moment interactions that actually prevailed during such episodes.

²⁶⁴ Feng Menglong, *Stories to Awaken the World* 醒世恒言 [1627], 581.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

Applying Thomas Turino's classification of performance types once again, the above-mentioned excerpts from the "Mr Dugu..." story collectively suggest that the performances at private functions often aligned with a sequential participatory/presentational model: over the course of the evening, the dynamics would shift back and forth between presentational episodes (where the courtesan performer would be the sole focal point of the guests' attention) and participative episodes (where others would contribute through interjections, commentary, or even music-making).²⁶⁶

3.4.3 Loose Musical Collaboration between Courtesans and Clients

As noted above, at Ming period private parties, the performances could often be participatory in nature, prioritizing various forms of engagement, interaction, and socialization in the interests of fostering a relaxed, casual atmosphere. In some cases, however, the musical experience could involve actual musical collaboration, whereby the courtesans and guests would make music together. An illustrative example can be found in the description of the courtesan Li Da-niang in *Banqiao Zaji* 板桥杂记 (Miscellaneous Records of the Plank Bridge). Living a life of opulence, she frequently held drinking parties at her residence, extending invitations to guests to partake in musical enjoyment:

所居台榭庭室，极其华丽，侍儿曳罗縠者十余人。置酒高会，则合弹琵琶、箏，或狎客.....数辈，吹洞箫、笙管，唱时曲。酒半，打十番鼓。曜灵西匿，继以华灯，罗帟从风，不知喔喔鸡鸣，东方既白矣。

Her abode, with its terrace, pavilion, courtyard, and chambers, was extremely beautiful and magnificent. Of attendants in trailing silk skirts, there were ten or so. During grand feasts and gatherings, they played the *pipa* and the zither in unison, and sometimes intimates (Da-niang's frequenters) ...played the flute and the *sheng* pipes and sang popular songs. When they had had enough wine, they would play the ten-

²⁶⁶ Turino, *Music as social life: The politics of participation*, 48-49.

instrument ensemble. After sunset, splendid lamps continued the light. Silken curtains fluttered in the wind, and before one knew it the roosters were crowing and dawn had broken in the east.²⁶⁷ [Li Wai-yee translation]

A well-connected courtesan like Li Da-niang had the means to organize such extravagant private banquets, and the description above enumerates the various musical activities that unfolded. Here, Li Da-niang notably plays string instruments alongside a dozen or so attendants. She also collaborates with selected guests in singing popular songs and playing the flute and pipes — both commonly employed as accompaniment instruments in southern *qu*, indicating a southern style of music. As the night progresses, with wine consumption and the party atmosphere reaching its zenith, impromptu musical collaborations spontaneously ensue, and they begin to play the ten-instrument ensemble²⁶⁸ (also mentioned in the previous section about large public gatherings). The musical celebrations lasted from dusk till dawn.

A related example of courtesan/guest musical collaboration is recounted in *Xing Shi Yan* 型世言 (Words that Shape the World) by the Ming dynasty novelist Lu Renlong 陆人龙. Here, we read of the courtesan Wang Cuiqiao 王翠翘 partaking in musical sessions with her literati guests, wherein they “sang song excerpts unaccompanied, and blew the *xiao* flute and played the clappers, joking about passionate love affairs 清歌短唱，吹箫拍板，嘲弄风月.”²⁶⁹

Evidently, such collaborative musical ensembles were not confined to private indoor quarters but could also occur in outdoor settings. A case in point is presented in the short story “In Defiance, Lu Wuhan Refuses to Give Up the Coloured Shoes”, which narrates an incident

²⁶⁷ Yu Huai, "Miscellaneous Records of the Plank Bridge 板桥杂记 [1693]," 93-94.

²⁶⁸ The original Chinese term is *shi fan gu* 十番鼓, a kind of string, wind, and percussion ensemble consisting of ten instruments, including *dizi* flute, *guan* pipe, *xiao* vertical flute, *sanxian* (plucked string instrument), *huqin* (bowed string instrument), *yunluo* and *tangluo* (percussion instruments), *muyu* (wooden blocks), *tan'gu* (sandalwood drums), and *dagu* (Chinese bass drums). Li Wai-yee translates *shi fan gu* as “ten-variation ensemble”, but I have changed it to “ten-instrument ensemble” in this quotation. See: Li Dou, *Yangzhou huafang lu* 扬州画舫录 [Records of painted pleasure boats in Yangzhou], Essays of Chinese Classics 中华经典随笔, (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2007), 173.

²⁶⁹ Lu Renlong, *Xing shi yan shang* 型世言 [Words that shape the world], 3 vols., vol. 1, Ancient novel Collection 古本小说集成, (Shanghai: Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House, 1994), 308.

where a patron recruits two courtesans to join him and his friends for a springtime outing and boat excursion:

一日，正值春间，西湖上桃花盛开。隔夜请了两个名妓，一个唤做娇娇，一个唤著倩倩，又约了一般几个子弟，教人唤下湖船，要去游玩。……后面跟一个垂髫标致小厮，叫做清琴，是他的宠童。左臂上挂著一件披风，右手拿著一张弦子，一管紫箫，都是蜀锦制成囊儿盛裹。

One spring day, when the peach blossoms along West Lake were in full bloom, Zhang Jin went on a boat tour with two famous courtesans, Jiaojiao and Qianqian, whom he had engaged the previous evening, along with a few of his male friends... He sallied forth, followed by a pretty young boy, his favourite page boy, called Qingqin, who carried over his left arm a cape and held with his right hand a three-stringed zither and a purple *xiao* flute in covers made of Sichuan brocade.

……

出了钱塘门，来到湖船上。那时两个妓女和著一班子弟，都已先到。……张荇下了船，清琴把衣服弦子、箫儿放下。稍子开船，向湖心中去。……且说张荇船中这班子弟们，一个个吹弹歌唱，施逞技艺。

After he passed through Qiantang Gate, he arrived at the spot where the boat he had engaged was moored. The two courtesans and his group of friends were already in the boat...After he stepped into the boat, Qingqin put down the cape, the zither, and the flute, and the boatman began to punt the boat toward the middle of the lake...In the boat, every one of Zhang Jin's friends sang and played musical instruments in a show of their artistic skills...²⁷⁰ [Yang Shuhui and Yang Yunqin translation]

Although the latter episode lacks detailed description, the implication is that the entertainment on the boat involved a musical collaboration between courtesans and guests, playing strings, *xiao*, and singing together.

²⁷⁰ Feng Menglong, *Stories to Awaken the World* 醒世恒言 [1627], 323-24.

In some instances, courtesan/guest collaboration also involved musical composition, dance, and lyric writing. An apt example is found in an episode from “A Biography of Yang Qiuji”, by Pan Zhiheng 潘之恒. Here, in return for receiving the gift of two newly composed songs from Pan Zhiheng, the courtesan Yang Qiuji 杨璆姬 dances to his songs:

明日，投以歌二章。……

始得诗，甚喜，请曰：“君为赵歌，妾当为赵舞。”每歌一阕，辄起舞。曼睩转盼，翩如惊鸿，人从旁啧啧嗟异。²⁷¹

The next day, I gifted her two songs... When she received the poems, she was very happy and said, “You have composed these Zhao-style songs for me, and I should return the favour with a Zhao-style dance.” Every time a song was played, she danced to it. Her bright gaze turned and flowed, her movements were as light as the flying geese, and the onlookers were all amazed.

Another example is from the short story “Chen Kechang Becomes an Immortal during the Dragon Boat Festival”, which showcases lyric improvisation and impromptu singing during a private gathering. At the behest of the prince, the courtesan Fresh Lotus performs a spontaneous rendition of newly composed lyrics by the monk Kechang. Following this, Kechang also engages in a session of lyrical improvisation:

郡王……传旨唤出新荷姐，就教他唱可常这词。……手拏象板，立于筵前，唱起绕梁之声，众皆喝采。郡王又教可常做新荷姐词一篇，还要《菩萨蛮》。可常执笔便写，词曰：天生体态腰肢细，新词唱彻歌声利。一曲泛清奇，扬尘簌簌飞。……

The prince...ordered that Sister Fresh Lotus be brought in to sing what Kechang had just written... Ivory clappers in hand, she stood before the dinner table and started singing in her sweet voice. After an enthusiastic ovation from the audience, the prince

²⁷¹ Pan Zhiheng, *Pan zhiheng quhua* 潘之恒曲话 [Words on Pan Zhiheng's qu], 107-08.

told Kechang to write a lyric poem on the girl, again to the tune of “Deva-like Barbarian.” Without a moment’s hesitation, Kechang wrote: Born with a narrow waist and filled with grace, she sings the lyrics in her dulcet voice. The clear and sublime notes of the song, send specks of dust floating around...²⁷² [Yang Shuhui and Yang Yunqin translation]

3.4.4 Dancing

Dancing, as a type of presentational performance, was often featured at private gatherings during the Ming era. A defining characteristic of dancing in such contexts was the use of a small-sized carpet, known as a *qu shu* 毼氍,²⁷³ placed under the courtesan’s feet. This served to clearly demarcate the performance space, thereby enhancing the separation between performer and audience. Figure 3.3 (below) showcases an extract from the Ming dynasty painter Qiu Ying’s 仇英 “The Painting of a Hundred Beauties”. Although the identities of the women in the painting are unknown, their engagement with instruments other than the high-status *guzhen* suggests that they could have been courtesans. The scene depicts a gorgeously dressed woman dancing in the centre on a round cyan carpet adorned with a circle of peacock plumes, accompanied by an instrumental ensemble of eight women to her right, while four other women leisurely enjoy the performance to her left.

²⁷² Feng Menglong, *Stories to Caution the World* 警世通言 [1624], 101-02.

²⁷³ The term *qu shu* 毼氍 refers to a carpet made from a mixture of silk, wool, and linen, often woven with patterns. This term first appeared in the book *shuowen jiezi* 说文解字, compiled by the Eastern Han dynasty philologist Xu Shen 许慎 (c.58 - c.147), where it is stated, “*Qu shu* and *ta deng*, both refer to rugs or carpets. 毼氍、氍毹, 皆氍毹之属。” Xu Shen, *Shuowen jiezi zhu* 说文解字注 [Annotations on ‘discussing writing and explaining characters’] (Shanghai: Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House, 1981), 399.



Figure 3.3: A female performer dancing on a carpet flanked by girls playing stringed instruments, flutes, pipes, and clappers. Qiuying 仇英, *Baimei Tu* 百美图 [The Painting of a Hundred Beauties], National Palace Museum.²⁷⁴

An episode from the short story “Secretary Qian Leaves Poems on the Swallow Tower” also demonstrates the use of carpets in the context of musical performances at private gatherings:

喜乐天远来，遂置酒邀饮于公馆，只见：
幕卷流苏，帘垂朱箔，瑞脑烟喷宝鸭，香醪光溢琼壶。果劈天浆，食烹异味。
绮罗珠翠，列两行粉面梅妆；脆管繁音，奏一派新声雅韵。遍地舞裯铺蜀锦，
当筵歌拍按红牙。

Delighted by this visit of a guest from afar, Jianfeng set out wine in his residence in honour of Bai Juyi. Behold:

The tasselled curtains are drawn;

The red shades are lowered.

Wisps of smoke rise from the duck-shaped incense burner;

²⁷⁴ Qiu Ying, *Baimei tu* 百美图 [The painting of a hundred beauties], Ming dynasty, National Palace Museum.

Fragrant wine sparkles in jade cups filled to the brim.

The fruit juices are as sweet as nectar;

The food is as delicious as ambrosia.

Bedecked in jewels and fine silks, the beauties

Stand in two rows in all their finery.

The orchestra, in crisp notes,

Strikes up sweet and fresh music.

Brocade carpets are spread out for the dancers;

Rosewood clappers are beaten to the song's rhythm.²⁷⁵

[Yang Shuhui and Yang Yunqin translation]

In this story, as evocatively expressed above, the host Jianfeng holds a lavish yet not overly large banquet at his private mansion to welcome guests from afar. The banquet features wind ensembles and vocal singing accompanied by wood clappers, as well as a dancing performance carried out on brocade carpets. Although the story is set in the Tang dynasty, its description embodies the aesthetics of the Ming period, incorporating essential elements from Ming era southern-style music, including woodwind (*guan* 管 – translated somewhat misleadingly as “orchestra” in the above translation), rosewood clappers, and song.

More illustrations depicting Ming era courtesans dancing on small carpets include: an illustration from the short story “Emperor Yang of the Sui Dynasty Is Punished for His Life of Extravagance” (Figure 3.4), a woodblock painting from the Ming drama compilation *A New Collection of Brocade-Winning Majestic Official Tunes and Folk Songs* 新刊徽板合像滚调乐府官腔摘锦奇音 (Figure 3.5), a woodblock paintings from Gu Zhengyi's 顾正谊 *Pictorial Catalogue of a Hundred Odes on Things* 百咏图谱 (Figure 3.6), and an image taken from the Ming era painting *A Painting of the Prosperous Central South* 南中繁盛图 (Figure 3.7).

²⁷⁵ Feng Menglong, *Stories to Caution the World* 警世通言 [1624], 143.

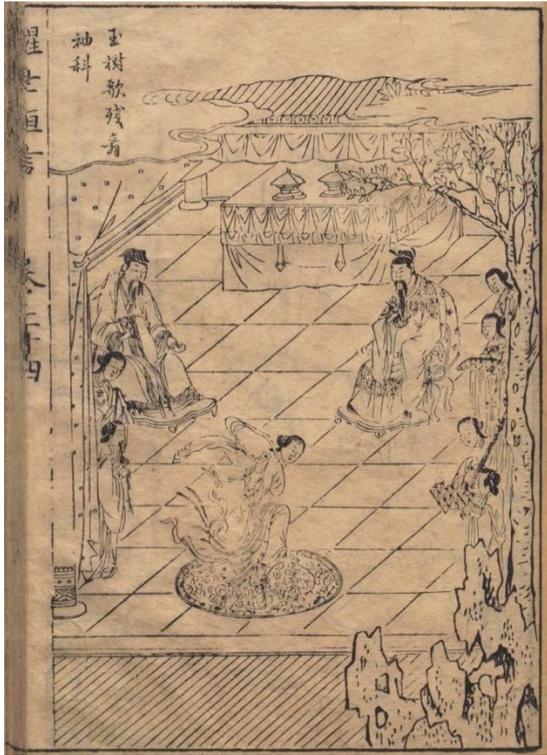


Figure 3.4: A courtesan dancing at the front of the hall accompanied by four women playing clappers, *xiao*, and a stringed instrument, while two male audience members sit in the centre and watch with rapt attention. From Volume 24, “Emperor Yang of the Sui Dynasty Is Punished for His Life of Extravagance” 隋炀帝逸游召譴, in Feng Menglong, *Xing Shi Heng Yan* 醒世恒言 [Stories to Awaken the World]. Hanshu 漢書 [Chinese books], National Archives of Japan.²⁷⁶



Figure 3.5: A courtesan dancing in the courtyard accompanied by *pipa*, clappers, and a drum, while three male viewers stand in the back, absentmindedly enjoying the show. From *Xinkan Huiban Hexiang Gundiao Yuefu Guanqiang Zhaijin Qiyin* 新刊徽板合像滾調樂府官腔摘錦奇音 [A New Collection of Brocade-Winning Majestic Official Tunes and Folk Songs], edited by Xi Zhengwo 襲正我, Hanshu 漢書 [Chinese books], National Archives of Japan.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁶ Feng Menglong, *Xing shi heng yan* 醒世恒言 [Stories to awaken the world], 1627, Hanshu 漢書 [Chinese books], 40, National Archives of Japan.

²⁷⁷ Xi Zhengwo, *Xinkan huiban hexiang gundiao yuefu guanqiang zhaijin qiyin* 新刊徽板合像滾調樂府官腔摘錦奇音 [A new collection of brocade-winning majestic official tunes and folk songs], 1611, Hanshu 漢書 [Chinese books], 35, National Archives of Japan.



Figure 3.6: A woman dancing in the garden, with four men, a woman, and two servants watching. “The Dancing courtesan” (舞妓 *wu ji*). From Gu Zhengyi 顾正谊 *Bai Yong Tu Pu* 百咏图谱 [Pictorial Catalogue of A Hundred Odes on Things], Hanji 汉籍 [Chinese books], Yamaguchi University Library.²⁷⁸



Figure 3.7: A woman dancing on the terrace, with four women providing musical accompaniment on the right side of the room, and three male viewers sitting on a sofa bench in the centre. An excerpt from the Ming period painting *Nanzhong Fansheng Tu* 南中繁盛图 [The Painting of the Prosperous Central South].²⁷⁹

Though the narrative in Figure 3.4 (above) is set during the Sui dynasty (581-618), the representation of the courtesan’s dancing performance can be understood as a Ming dynasty painter’s imaginative reconstruction of the historical setting. The column to the left implies that the scene might be set in a hall adjacent to a rear garden. The mist overhead signals that the setting is in the emperor’s dream. A female dancer, identified by the plot as the deceased

²⁷⁸ Gu Zhengyi, *Bai yong tu pu* 百咏图谱 [Pictorial catalogue of a hundred odes on things], 1598, Hanji 汉籍 [Chinese books], 100, Yamaguchi University Library.

²⁷⁹ *Nanzhong fansheng tu* 南中繁盛图 [Painting of the prosperity of central South], Ming Dynasty, Exhibition of Ancient Chinese Costume Culture, National Museum of China, Beijing.

former imperial concubine Lihua 丽华, is seen dancing on a small, round, patterned carpet. Her arms are raised, her sleeves flutter in the air, her body is slightly tilted to one side, and one knee is gently lifted. To either side of the hall, six maids provide musical accompaniment with a plucked string instrument, clappers, and *xiao* flute. Seated at the centre of the hall are two male audience members, Emperor Wen of the Sui dynasty 隋文帝 and the deceased former emperor Chen Shubao 陈叔宝, who watch the dancing concubine. Notably, there is ample space between the main performer, the accompanying musicians, and the audience.

In Figure 3.5 (above), the performance unfolds in a spatially compact open-air garden where the performers fail to captivate the full attention of the audience and the performance appears undervalued. Six performers occupy a smaller space at the front of the scene, with one woman dancing at the centre on a compact carpet, while the remaining five play the *pipa*, clappers, and drum. However, two of them are engrossed in conversation and not participating in the performance. Three male audience members are situated in the more spacious rear area of the garden alongside a wine-pouring servant boy. Two of them are engaged in a cheerful conversation, while the third seems entranced by the natural landscape outside the courtyard. The audience and the performers are separated by what appears to be a step or a bar. This seems to be a northern-style performance, as evidenced by the fur accessories on the performers' heads and the northern tune "The Fragrance Fills the Courtyard" (满庭芳 *man ting fang*) cited on the subsequent page of the original illustration.²⁸⁰

Conversely, the audience in Figure 3.6 (above) seems wholly absorbed in the solo performance of the dancing courtesan, setting it apart from the previous examples. The accompanying poem titled "Dancing courtesan" (舞妓 *wuji*) indicates the artist's intention to spotlight the dancer and underscore the importance and allure of her performance:

金尊银烛敞华堂，歌罢偏怜舞媚娘。
鸂鶒含姿频应节，柘枝转盼忽生香。
回腰掌上金莲窄，垂手花前翠袖长。
不羨公孙通剑术，翩翩侠态自飞扬。²⁸¹

²⁸⁰ *Zhongguo quxue da cidian* 中国曲学大辞典 [Dictionary of Chinese qu study], 746.

²⁸¹ Gu Zhengyi, *Bai yong tu pu* 百咏图谱 [Pictorial catalogue of a hundred odes on things]: 100.

Golden wine vessels and silver candlesticks light up the grand hall,
And when the song is over, I fall in love with this charming dancer.
The starling echoes the rhythm, often matching the beat with graceful postures.
As she dances in the *zhezhi* style,
A sudden fragrance arises when she turns her glamorous gaze.
Turning her waist and moving lightly,
It seems her slim golden lotus feet could dance on my palms.
In front of the flower clusters with hands drooping,
Her emerald-coloured sleeves are long.
She does not envy those gentlemen who excelled in swordsmanship,
Gracefully and lightly, her chivalrous spirit soars without restraint.

Notably, the dancing courtesan is referred to as a starling, implying her elegant movements and deft dancing skills. The aroma, her “golden lotus” feet that seem able to dance in one’s palms, and the flower clusters suggest that the scene is an outdoor garden – rich details highlighting the vividness of the performance. Furthermore, the poem’s reference to the courtesan’s lack of envy for the gentlemen who excel in swordsmanship suggests the author’s praise for the courtesan: while being light and graceful, her dance is also chivalrous – a term of praise typically reserved for men.

The performance scene in Figure 3.7 (above) is an open room with terraces on all four sides, also demonstrating a musical scene with dancing at its centre: an audience of three men sits on a wooden bench while a courtesan dances on a carpet on the terrace, accompanied by four women who play the *dizi* transverse flute, *sheng* mouthorgan, and shakers.



Figure 3.8: An illustration for *Yu He Ji* 玉合记. Li Zhi 李贽, and Mei Dingzuo 梅鼎祚. *Li Zhuowu Xian Sheng Pi Ping Yu He Ji* 李卓吾先生批評玉合記 [The Story of the Jade Box, with Li Zhuowu's Critical Comments], Library of Congress.²⁸²

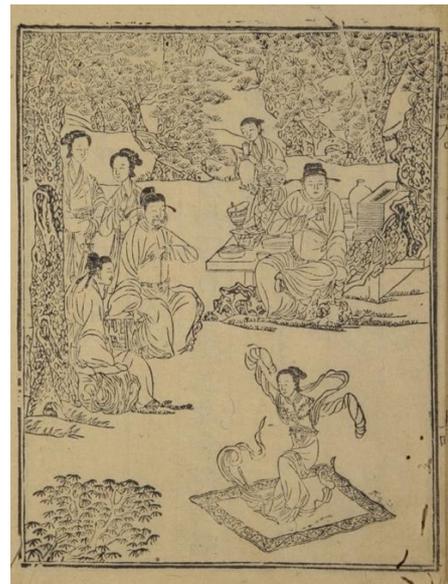


Figure 3.9: "Ode to Dance" (咏舞 *Yong wu*). From Gu Zhengyi 顾正谊 *Bai Yong Tu Pu* 百咏图谱 [Pictorial Catalogue of a Hundred Odes on Things], Hanji 汉籍 [Chinese books], Yamaguchi University Library.²⁸³

Figure 3.8 (above) is an illustration from Li Zhi 李贽 and Mei Dingzuo's 梅鼎祚 drama script *Yu he ji* 玉合记 (The Story of the Jade Box), and Figure 3.9 (above) is a woodblock painting from Gu Zhengyi's *Bai Yong Tu Pu* 百咏图谱 (Pictorial Catalogue of a Hundred Odes on Things). Despite originating from distinct sources, both figures exhibit remarkable similarities, depicting literati patrons relishing a courtesan's dance performance in outdoor settings. It is evident that both illustrators adhered to the same artistic convention, and it is plausible that one might have drawn inspiration from the other, although discerning the chronology of the two paintings proves challenging. Both images portray a dance performance at a private outdoor gathering, with a courtesan dancing atop a square carpet, her

²⁸² Li Zhi and Mei Dingzuo, *Li Zhuowu xian sheng pi ping yu he ji* 李卓吾先生批評玉合記 [The story of the jade box, with Li Zhuowu's critical comments], 1368, Chinese Books, Manuscripts, Maps, and Prints, National Central Library.

²⁸³ Gu Zhengyi, *Bai yong tu pu* 百咏图谱 [Pictorial catalogue of a hundred odes on things]: 136.

arms elevated and sleeves billowing. A considerable expanse separates the viewers from the performer. The main male audience members (two in Figure 3.8 and three in Figure 3.9) are depicted in relaxed postures, sipping wine while appreciating the performance. Situated behind them are a servant boy tasked with pouring the wine, and two women. In Figure 3.8, the woman on the left appears to be accompanying the performance with clappers, while in Figure 3.9, the two women seem engaged in conversation, with one raising her hands to her chest, possibly clapping in time to the dance.

I contend that several common features can be discerned from the aforementioned performance scenes (Figures 3.4-3.9):

- a) The dance performances transpire in a diverse range of settings, including indoors, gardens adjacent to residences, or outdoors, as evidenced by the presence of rockeries, green foliage, terraces, and natural scenes.
- b) The solo-dancing courtesan strives to command the undivided attention of the audience, although there are instances where the audience appears indifferent.
- c) The focal point of the solo dance performance seems to revolve around accentuating the dancer's arm movements, which are highlighted by the long sleeves and *pibo* 帔帛 (a type of women's shawl prevalent in ancient China), as observed by the invariably fluttering *pibo* in the illustrations.²⁸⁴
- d) Notably, a diminutive carpet is consistently positioned beneath the dancer's feet. The question remains as to whether this petite carpet, which ostensibly could have considerably constrained the performer's range of movement, was indeed a commonly utilized prop during the Ming period or merely a hyperbolic representational convention employed by Ming painters. The latter is a distinct possibility given the oftentimes substantial divergence between artistic interpretations and actual practices. I posit that rather than circumscribing the dancer's mobility, the carpet fulfils the function of demarcating a clearly defined focal area for the dance.

284. Peng Xu has mentioned the sleeve-waving in the Ming era courtesans' performance. See: Xu, "Lost Sound: Singing, Theatre, and Aesthetics in Late Ming China, 1547-1644," 104. I have also discussed this phenomenon in Chapter 6.



Figure 3.10: A young girl practicing dance in front of four women. “A dancing waist” (舞腰 *wu yao*). From Gu Zhengyi 顾正谊 *Bai Yong Tu Pu* 百咏图谱 [Pictorial Catalogue of a Hundred Odes on Things], Hanji 漢籍 [Chinese books], Yamaguchi University Library.²⁸⁵

Another illustration from the *Bai Yong Tu Pu* (Pictorial Catalogue of a Hundred Odes on Things) entitled “A dancing waist” (Figure 3.10), unveils a divergent context for the courtesan solo dance performance: the training procedure. This image portrays a diminutive young girl (possibly even a child) dancing within a garden setting, her left hand held aloft and her right knee delicately raised. Her simple attire starkly contrasts with the elaborate costumes adorned by dancers in previously discussed performance contexts, though long sleeves are maintained as essential props. A notable observation is the absence of a carpet beneath the performer’s feet, indicative of the informal nature of the performance, presumably a training session. To the right side of the illustration, four female onlookers are depicted, three of

²⁸⁵ Gu Zhengyi, *Bai yong tu pu* 百咏图谱 [Pictorial catalogue of a hundred odes on things]: 107.

whom are engaged in conversation. The woman on the far left, armed with a round fan, is directing it towards the dancing girl, seemingly to be beating time for the performance. Her smile and evident pleasure for the dancing are palpable. Adjacent to the image, a poem elucidates the training context:

楚腰婀娜不胜衣，学舞花前月影微。
束素可怜轻欲举，凌风浑似彩鸾飞。²⁸⁶

Her waist so graceful and slender, she could hardly bear her clothes;
Learning to dance before the flowers, her shadow dim beneath the moon.
Her waist as loveable as a bundle of silk, so light to be easily lifted;
Embracing the wind, like a colourful *luan* bird flying.²⁸⁷

This poem imparts a series of messages to its readers. The slender waist is recurrently accentuated, implying it was a highly coveted physical characteristic in the Ming period. The portrayal of the petite young girl may allude to the tender age at which training was initiated, or it could be an intentional depiction by the author, reflective of the contemporary extreme aesthetic penchant for a slim waist. Moreover, the second line insinuates that the training sessions were nocturnal, a plausible circumstance given that courtesans might have been occupied with other commitments during the daytime.

3.5 Pleasure Chambers: Performances at Intimate Gatherings

Most of the Ming accounts of courtesan performances that we have access to focus on describing musical scenes at public or private gatherings. The more intimate musical performances that sometimes took place in private chambers were often excluded from publications due to their invisibility and the perceived indecent sexual acts that were assumed

²⁸⁶ Gu Zhengyi, *Bai yong tu pu* 百咏图谱 [Pictorial catalogue of a hundred odes on things]: 107.

²⁸⁷ *Luan* 鸾, a mythological bird in ancient Chinese mythology.

to have occurred in the aftermath.²⁸⁸ However, a small number of descriptions relating to the courtesans' performances in such intimate settings remain.

The very beginning of *Banqiao Zaji* 板桥杂记 (Miscellaneous Records of the Plank Bridge) portrays a detailed picture of young upper class men in Jinling (nowadays' Nanjing), including nobles and literati, enjoying themselves in courtesan houses, by consuming alcoholic drinks and food, and enjoying music and other luxurious sensual pleasures. As night falls, the loiterers and others are sent away, while the special guests are kept to enjoy the continuing entertainment through the night — as participants in more intimate gatherings.²⁸⁹

In contrast to the livelier banquet performances, performances in intimate settings usually enjoyed a more tranquil ambiance and, therefore, required minimal accompaniment — a stringed instrument (usually a *pipa*), or any object that could beat time (such as a fan), sufficing. The performance style, again, mainly consisted of solo singing or singing with simple accompaniment. The performance could take place in either indoor or outdoor settings with very few participants, usually just one courtesan with one guest. Maids and servant-boys would not be counted if they were not engaged in musical practice. The context was usually highly private, and the courtesan and guest might indulge in intimacy during and after the banquet.

An excerpt from *Yan Yi Bian* 艳异编 (A Collection of Luscious and Indulgent Love Affairs) portrays a typical night-time pure singing performance. In this episode, the beauty Wei Fanghua 卫芳华 (who we learn from the plot is a ghost of a former court lady)

²⁸⁸ Of course, the erotic publishing industry was also well-developed during the Ming dynasty, including various types of erotic drawings. However, given that I am dealing with textual and visual resources related to courtesans and music-making, erotic drawings are not within my scope of reference, as they generally lack elements related to music performances.

²⁸⁹ “Jinling was the place where kings and emperors established their capitals...And then there were the young men from the most distinguished lineages: whenever their roaming took them to the lakes and the sea, they never failed to bring their bows or play their flutes as they passed by the houses of famous courtesans. Every time they held feasts and entertained, they would send for denizens of the Music Registry (registered courtesan), and fine silks would waft their fragrance. Wine cups were raised as the wine made its round, and the special ones were asked to tarry as other guests were sent off. When the drinking was over and the chess games were done, earrings would have fallen and hairpins would have been left behind. It was truly the fairy precinct of the realm of desire, and the domain of pleasures in an era of peace and prosperity. 金陵为帝王建都之地.....必及乌衣子弟, 湖海宾游, 靡不挟弹吹箫, 轻过赵李, 每开筵宴, 则傅呼乐籍, 罗绮芬芳, 行酒斜觞, 留髡送客, 酒阑棋罢, 堕珥遗簪, 真愁界之仙都, 升平之乐国也!” Li Wai-yee translation. See: Yu Huai, "Miscellaneous Records of the Plank Bridge 板桥杂记 [1693]," 70-71.

composes a new lyric to an existing tune and asks her maid Qiaoqiao 翘翘 to sing for her guest in order to lift the mood:

即命侍女曰：「翘翘可于舍中取裯席酒果来，今夜月色如此，郎君又至，不可虚度。可便于此赏月也。」翘翘应命而去。须臾，携紫氍毹铺于中庭，设白玉碾花樽，碧琉璃盏，醪醴馨香，非世所有。与生谈谑笑咏，词旨清婉，复命翘翘歌以侑酒。翘翘请歌柳耆卿《望海潮》词，美人曰：「对新人不宜歌旧曲。」即于座上自制《木兰花慢》一阕，命翘翘歌之。²⁹⁰

(Wei Fanghua) asked the maid, “Qiaoqiao, can you go to the room to get the carpet, wine, and fruit? The moonlight is so beautiful tonight, and the gentleman is here, so we must not let this night go to waste. We can admire the moon here.” Qiaoqiao took her order and left. Soon after, she returned carrying a purple-embroidered woollen carpet and laid it in the middle of the courtyard, decorated with a white jade flower-grinding jar,²⁹¹ jasper coloured glaze glasses, and fragrant sweet wine, all looking too good to exist in this world. The beauty and the gentleman chatted happily, writing lyrics for pleasure. The verses they created were elegant and graceful, so they decided to ask Qiaoqiao to sing and entertain while they drank. Qiaoqiao proposed to sing the words of Liu Jieqing’s “Looking at the Tide of the Sea,” but the beauty Fanghua said, “It is not appropriate to sing old songs to a new guest.” So, she composed a new lyric to the tune of “Slowly, the Magnolia Flower” and asked Qiaoqiao to sing it.

It is worth noting the carpet’s presence in this scene, suggesting that carpets were also used in contexts other than dance performance. The maid lays the carpet down in the courtyard for the intimate party to sit upon, and sets it up with wine for them to drink as they enjoy the moon.

²⁹⁰ From the short story “A Record of Tengmu’s Drunken Visit to Jujing Garden” 滕穆醉游聚景园记. See: Wang Yanzhou, *Yan yi bian* 艳异编 [A collection of luscious and indulgent love affairs] [1571-1596] (Shenyang: Chunfeng Literature and Art Publishing House, 1988), volume 39, 523. The passage is originally compiled in Feng Menglong’s *History of Love* 情史.

²⁹¹ The “flower-grinding jar” (*nianhua zun* 碾花樽) was an ancient tool used for grinding flower petals, leaves, and aromatic woods into powder, which would then be used to create fragrances. It was also considered an art decoration, often intricately carved with beautiful patterns.

A similar example of an intimate gathering comes from the short story “Du Shi-niang Sinks Her Jewel Box in Anger”. Here, the male protagonist Li and the courtesan Shi-niang sit on a boat in the wintertime, enjoying the moon and drinking wine. The text recounts that “Li fetched wine utensils, spread out a rug on the bow, and sat down shoulder to shoulder with Shi-niang. They began passing the cups back and forth. 公子乃携酒具于船首，与十娘铺毡并坐，传杯交盏。” At the man’s request, the courtesan beats the rhythm with her fan and sings a song for him:

……今清江明月，深夜无人，肯为我一歌否？」十娘兴亦勃发，遂开喉顿嗓，取扇按拍，呜呜咽咽，……真个：声飞霄汉讼皆驻，响入深泉鱼出游。

“...Now, with the moon shining brightly on the clear water and no one around us in the depths of the night, would you be willing to sing for me?”

Shi-niang was so carried away that she cleared her throat and, beating time with her fan, started singing... Truly,

Her voice rose into the sky and stopped the clouds,

Dived down into the deep spring and brought out the fish.²⁹²

[Yang Shuhui and Yang Yunqin translation]

Another typical example comes from *Jin Ping Mei*, when the protagonists Ximen Qing and Pan Jinlian have a rendezvous at the household of Dame Wang, featuring a solo singing performance accompanied by *pipa* in an intimate setting:

西门庆与妇人重斟美酒，交杯叠股而饮。……西门庆一面取下琵琶来，搂妇人在怀，看著他放在膝儿上，轻舒玉笋，款弄冰弦，慢慢弹著，低声唱道……

Hsi-men Ch’ing and the woman:

Poured out some more of the superior wine,

Shared with each other the rare repast, and

Fell to exchanging cups, thigh over thigh...

²⁹² Feng Menglong, *Stories to Caution the World* 警世通言 [1624], 557.

Hsi-men Ch'ing took the *pipa* down from the wall, lifted the woman onto his lap, and watched her as she placed the instrument on her knees:

Deftly extended her slender fingers,
Gently manipulated the icy strings,
and played a languid accompaniment as she sang a song...²⁹³

[David Tod Roy translation]



Figure 3.11. The cover page of *Yu Gu Xin Huang* 玉谷新簧 (A New Pipe in the Jade Valley). From Ba Jing Jushi 八景居士, *Dingjuan Shixing Gundiao Geling Yu Gu Xin Huang* 鼎鑄時興滾調歌令玉谷新簧 [Newly Sculptured Popular Tunes and Songs and A New Pipe in the Jade Valley], Hanshu 漢書 [Chinese books], National Archives of Japan.

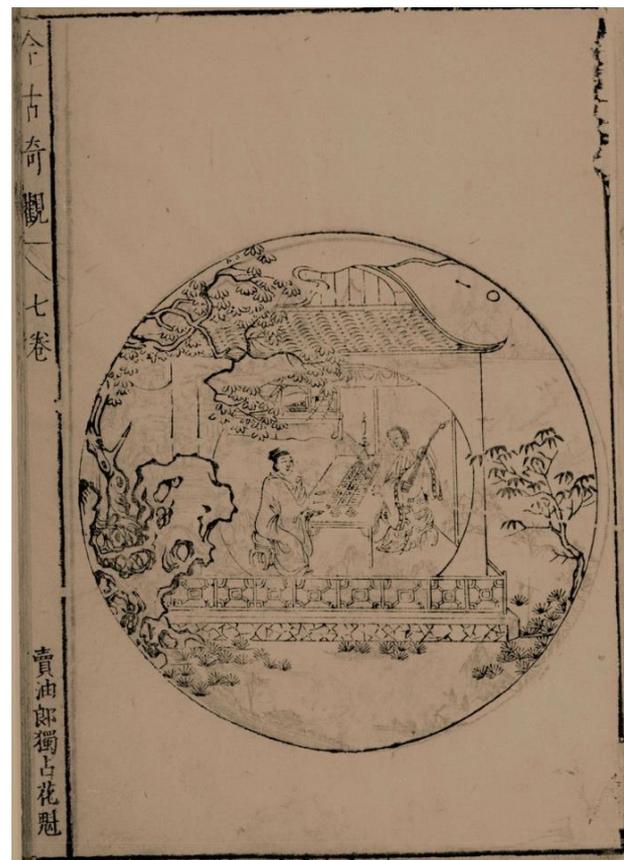


Figure 3.12. A courtesan playing the *pipa* and sitting opposite a guest. An illustration for the short story “The Oil-Peddler Wins the Queen of Flowers”. From Bao Weng Laoren 抱瓮老人, *Jin Gu Qi Guan* 今古奇观 [Wonders of the Past and Present], Bibliothèque nationale de France.

²⁹³ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume One: The Gathering*, 122-23.

The *pipa* is an instrument that carries strong associations with private passion and eroticism, frequently appearing in Ming period musical scenes depicting intimate gatherings. This is demonstrated, for example, in the cover page of the Ming era songbook *Yu Gu Xin Huang* 玉谷新簧 (A New Pipe in the Jade Valley) – Figure 3.11 (above).²⁹⁴ Here, the scene is a garden decorated with rocks and plants, and we see a man in scholar’s clothing embracing a courtesan who is playing a *xiao* flute. The man’s left-hand rests on a *pipa*, which is placed in the lap of the courtesan, seemingly touching the strings, while his right hand holds the *xiao*, which is being played by the courtesan. And although the courtesan is playing the *xiao*, her right hand is also placed on the *pipa*. This unusual setup has a hidden agenda: both the plucking of the strings and the blowing of the vertical *xiao* are erotic double extenders of sexual acts, as Judith T. Zeitlin has pertinently pointed out.²⁹⁵

Figure 3.12 (above) shows us another *pipa* solo performance in an intimate setting: in a semi-open room near a garden, a courtesan holding a *pipa* sits face-to-face with her guest, smiling in the candlelight. According to the storyline, that night, “Sister Mei (the courtesan) played her musical instruments, sang, and danced, trying to please him to the best of her ability. 美娘吹弹歌舞，曲尽生平之技，奉承秦重。” And when the wine was consumed, “the two of them went to bed in each other’s arms. 二人相挽就寝。”²⁹⁶

Meanwhile, Figure 3.13 (below) shows a *pipa* performance in an open-air garden setting, with a woman holding the instrument with her head tilted behind her and her body leaning back, apparently unwilling to engage in dialogue with the grovelling, obsequious literatus opposite her.

²⁹⁴ Ba Jing Jushi, Dingjuan shixing gundiao geling yugu xinhuang 鼎铸时兴滚调歌令玉谷新簧 [The newly sculptured popular tunes and songs and a new pipe in the jade valley], 1610, 3, Hanshu 漢書 [Chinese books], National Archives of Japan, <https://www.digital.archives.go.jp/file/1083498>. In the cover page, the title is *Yu Gu Tiao Huang* 玉谷调簧 (Tempering Pipes in the Jade Valley), yet according to the archive, its current title is *Yu Gu Xin Huang* 玉谷新簧 (A New Pipe in the Jade Valley).

²⁹⁵ Zeitlin, "The Gift of Song: Courtesans and Patrons in Late Ming and Early Qing Cultural Production," 3.

²⁹⁶ Feng Menglong, *Stories to Awaken the World* 醒世恒言 [1627], 69. Figure 3.12 is from: Bao Weng Laoren, *Jin gu qi guan* 今古奇观 [Wonders of the past and present], Ming dynasty, Bibliothèque nationale de France, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b9006384w>.

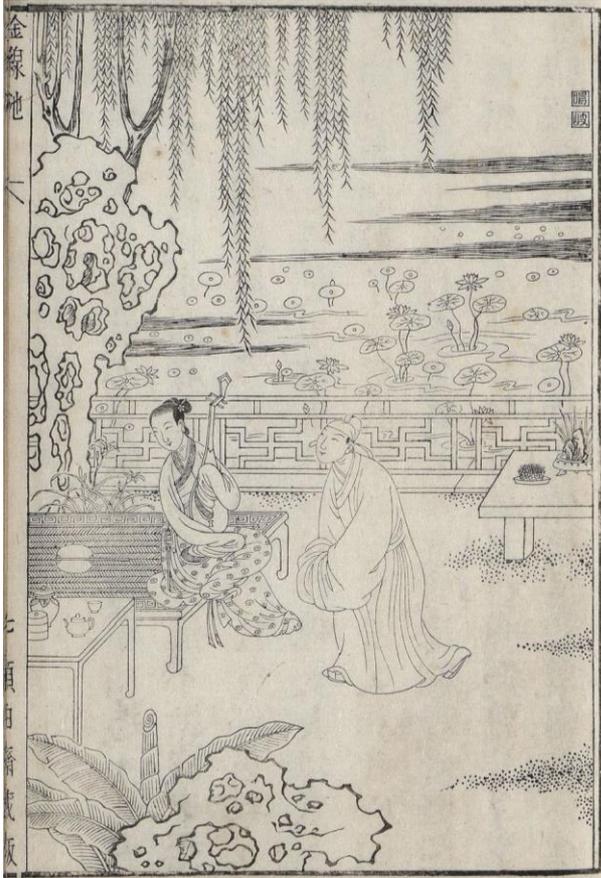


Figure 3.13. A woman and a man together in a garden, she is holding a *pipa*. From Wang Jide 王驥德, *Gu Zaju Ershi Zhong* 古杂剧二十种 [A Miscellany of Twenty Ancient Dramas], National Library of China.



Figure 3.14. An excerpt from Gu Hongzhong's 顾闳中 scroll painting *Han Xizai Yeyan Tu* 韩熙载夜宴图 [Night Revels of Han Xizai]. A Song dynasty facsimile, c. 1163-1224. Beijing: The Palace Museum, c. 907-960. Ink and Colour on Silk, Handscroll.

Figure 3.13 is a Ming era illustration based on the Yuan era drama script “Du Rui-niang wisely received her reward at the Golden Thread Pond” 杜蕊娘智赏金线池. As the storyline narrates, when the courtesan Du Rui-niang 杜蕊娘 is annoyed with her lover (the scholar Han Fuchen 韩辅臣), she calls on her maid Meixiang 梅香 to fetch her *pipa*, which she plays to express her displeasure:

..... (正旦云) 梅香, 将过琵琶来, 待我散心适闷咱! (梅香取砌末科, 云) 姐姐, 琵琶在此。..... (正旦做弹科, 唱):
 [牧羊关] 不见他思量旧, 倒有些两意儿投。我见了他扑邓邓火上浇油, 恰便似钩搭住鱼腮, 箭穿了雁口。(韩辅臣云) 元来你那旧性儿不改, 还弹唱哩! (正

旦做起拜科)(唱)你怪我依旧拈音乐,则许你交错劝觥筹?你不肯冷落了杯中物,我怎肯生疏了弦上手?²⁹⁷

... (The courtesan says,) Meixiang, bring me the *pipa* to relieve my boredom!

(Meixiang brings the performance props and says,) Sister, here's the *pipa*...

(The courtesan plays the *pipa* and sings):

[To the tune] The Shepherd's Pass:

When I don't see him, my longing continues, and

Somehow, I know we're in love with each other.

When I see him, it's like oil poured on fire, a hook hitching a fish's cheek, or

An arrow piercing a goose's mouth.

(Han Fuchen says,) I see you haven't changed your ways, and

You're still playing *pipa* and singing!

(The courtesan makes an obeisance to him, singing:)

How can you blame me for still playing music,

When you still indulge in drinking parties?

If you won't give up that drink in your cup,

How can I stop putting my hands on these strings?

The association of the *pipa* with love affairs and intimate settings is not limited to Ming dynasty imagery. Figure 3.14, an excerpt from the Southern Tang dynasty (c. 937-975) artist Gu Hongzhong's 顾闳中 painting *Han Xizai Yeyan Tu* 韩熙载夜宴图 (Night Revels of Han Xizai), demonstrates the long-standing nature of the instrument's erotic metaphors.²⁹⁸ In this painting, a *pipa* is laid across a bed with dishevelled bedding, most of which is hidden by curtains, leaving only the neck of the *pipa* visible. The disorderly and slightly elevated arrangement of the quilt suggests the occurrence of intimate sexual acts.

²⁹⁷ Wang Jide, *Gu zaju ershi zhong* 古杂剧二十种 [A miscellany of twenty ancient dramas], c. 1368-1644, 258-59, National Library of China.

²⁹⁸ Gu Hongzhong, *Han Xizai yeyan tu* 韩熙载夜宴图 [Night revels of Han Xizai], c. 907-960. 28.7cm x 335.5cm. The Palace Museum.

3.6 Self-exploration: Courtesans' Solitary Music-Making

The final type of courtesans' music-making to be discussed, which is also frequently overlooked, is their solitary music-making. Although one might contest the categorization of audience-less music-making as true performance, I contend that solitary music-making is indeed a form of performance centred upon the self, with the performer simultaneously assuming the roles of performer and listener, as Andrew Killick compellingly argues in his article "Holicipation: Prolegomenon to an Ethnography of Solitary Music-Making".²⁹⁹

Having substantial periods of solitude must have been highly beneficial, if not essential, for the courtesans. As Averill and Sundararajan point out, solitude is commonly experienced as a valuable forum for many personal endeavours, including: exploring and enhancing personal creativity, self-reflection and self-discovery, the review and analysis of emotions and thoughts, reminiscence and the ordering of memories, self-cultivation, the alleviation of feelings of boredom or alienation, experiencing inner psychological freedom, taking measures to promote a relaxed and harmonious inner state, striving for transcendence over every-day concerns, and promoting heightened sensory awareness.³⁰⁰ Considering the courtesans' lifestyles, it seems likely that even the most extrovert amongst them would have greatly valued their moments of solitude, using them for many of these purposes. For much of their professional everyday lives, the courtesans were on display to others and had to apply extensive concentration and energy to interact effectively with clients and associates. Accordingly, their intermittent periods of solitude would have provided them with what Robert Coplan and Julie Bowker refer to as a "restorative haven", where they could escape from social pressures, focus on bringing their inner worlds into a more harmonious state, and work on honing their abilities.³⁰¹

²⁹⁹ Andrew Killick, "Holicipation: Prolegomenon to an ethnography of solitary music-making" (paper presented at the Ethnomusicology Forum, 2006), 273-99.

³⁰⁰ James R. Averill and Louise Sundararajan, "Experiences of solitude: Issues of assessment, theory, and culture," in *The handbook of solitude: Psychological perspectives on social isolation, social withdrawal, and being alone*, ed. Robert J. Coplan and Julie C. Bowker (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 96-97.

³⁰¹ Robert J. Coplan and Julie C. Bowker, "All alone: Multiple perspectives on the study of solitude," in *The handbook of solitude: Psychological perspectives on social isolation, social withdrawal, and being alone*, ed. Robert J. Coplan and Julie C. Bowker (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 4.

In the Ming period sources, it is remarkable how often the courtesans are depicted as resorting to music-making in their moments of solitude. Indeed, the solitary music-making courtesan is a widely pervasive representational trope, occurring in a variety of forms – some centring on solo instrumental playing (most commonly featuring *pipa*, *guzheng* zither, *guqin* zither, or *xiao* flute) while others feature self-accompanied singing. Such self-performances could occur in indoor or outdoor settings and are commonly represented as being enhanced by an appreciation of the surrounding natural environment, most often at night-time.

Unsurprisingly, given the courtesans' occupation and the male literati's preoccupations, the sources tend not to consider the wider range of motivations that must have informed their solitary music-making (listed above); rather, they focus on the courtesans' efforts to address love-related matters.

The *pipa* is represented as having been a preferred instrument for exploring feelings of longing and passionate affection in the courtesans' solitary performances, in part due to its strong associations with themes of “lovesickness” and “love affairs” (as discussed earlier this chapter and in Chapter 4), and also because the player closely embraces the *pipa*'s body almost as though it were a surrogate person. An excerpt from *Jin Ping Mei* serves as a fitting example. When the female protagonist, Pan Jinlian, finds herself entangled in a romantic dilemma, she turns to the *pipa*, playing it in her boudoir at night to express her feelings of jealousy and sadness:

且说妇人在房中，香薰鸳被，款剔银灯，睡不著，短叹长吁。正是：得多少琵琶夜久殷勤弄，寂寞空房不忍弹。于是独自弹著琵琶，唱一个《绵搭絮》为证：「当初奴爱你风流，共你剪发燃香，……」

It so happens that, in her bedroom, the woman:

Perfumed with incense the mandarin duck quilt, and deftly trimmed the silver lamp's wick, but could not get to sleep. Giving vent to: long sighs as well as short, ...

She who is wont to diligently strum her *pipa*, late into the night;

When all alone in her deserted chamber can scarcely bear to play it.

At this juncture, accompanying herself on the *pipa*, she sang a suite of four songs to

the tune “Making Silk Floss,” which testifies to this:

In the beginning I loved you for being so romantic;

We exchanged locks of our hair and burned incense together...³⁰²

[David Tod Roy translation]

Another example can be found in an illustration from Wang Jide’s 王骥德 (c.1540-1623) *Gu Zaju Ershi Zhong* 古杂剧二十种 (A Miscellany of Twenty Ancient Dramas).

Despite the story being set during the reign of Emperor Yuan of Han (c. BC48-BC33) and the script being written by the Yuan era playwright Guan Hanqing 关汉卿 (c.1234-1300), the illustration itself was created during the Ming dynasty (Figure 20, below).³⁰³

³⁰² Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume One: The Gathering*, 155-56.

³⁰³ Wang Jide, *Gu zaju ershi zhong* 古杂剧二十种 [A miscellany of twenty ancient dramas]: 334-35. The script is entitled: “Shattering the serene dream, a lone wild goose in the Han palace autumn” [破幽梦孤雁汉宫秋]

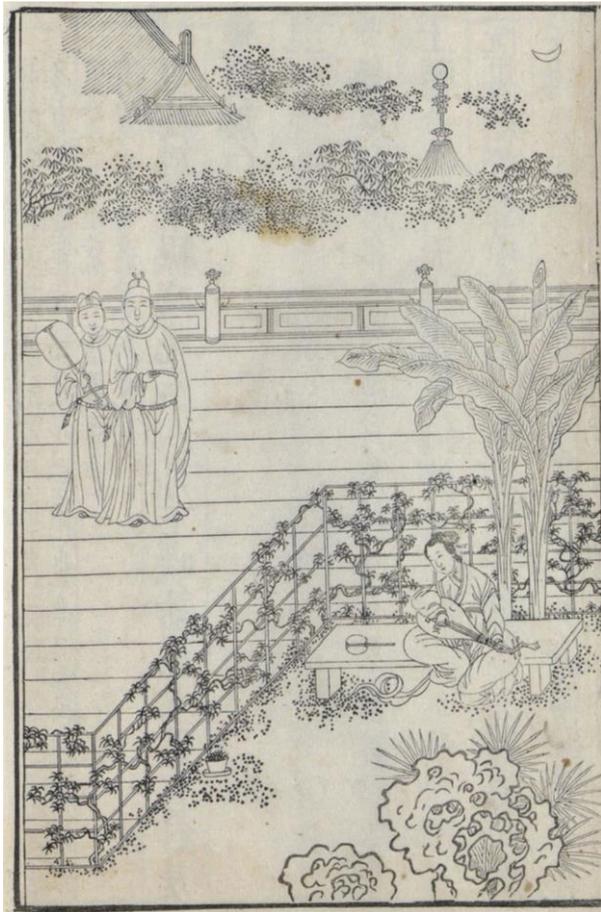


Figure 3.15. A woman playing *pipa* in a garden, oblivious to the fact that two men are watching her. From Wang Jide 王骥德, *Gu Zaju Ershi Zhong* 古杂剧二十种 [A Miscellany of Twenty Ancient Dramas], National Library of China.

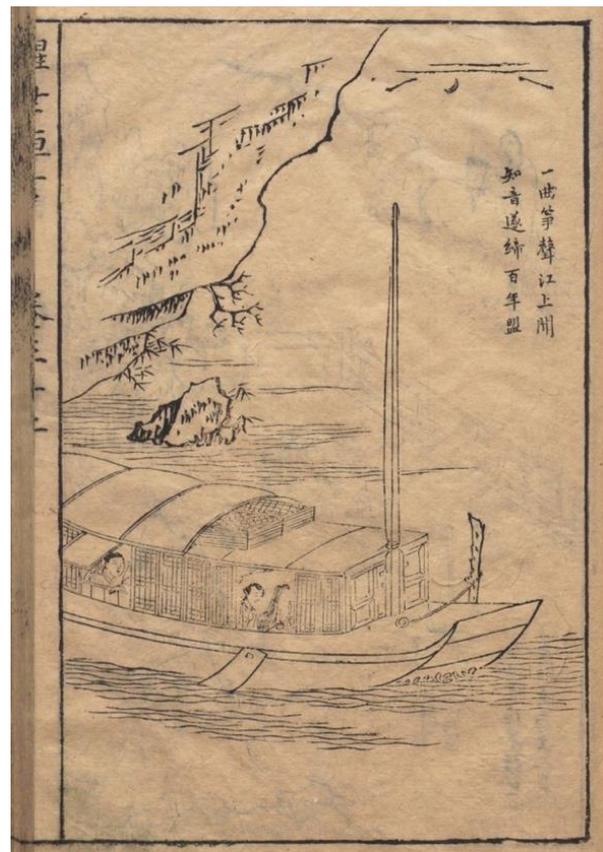


Figure 3.16. A woman playing *guzheng* zither on a boat while a man peeps at her. An illustration for the short story “Scholar Huang is Blessed with Divine Aid” in Feng Menglong’s 冯梦龙 *Xing Shi Heng Yan* 醒世恒言 [Stories to Awaken the World], Hanshu 漢書 [Chinese books], National Archives of Japan.

This illustration (Figure 3.15) depicts a palace garden scene where a woman, the imperial maid Wang Zhaojun 王昭君, is seated with a *pipa* resting across her legs, her right leg comfortably positioned on a bench, embodying a relaxed and leisurely demeanour. According to the script, her solo *pipa* playing serves as a means to alleviate her feelings of loneliness and boredom, during which she remains oblivious to the presence of any spectators. As she states:

.....良宵寂寂谁来伴，唯有琵琶引兴长。.....妾身在家颇通丝竹，弹得几曲琵琶。当此夜深孤闷之时，我试理一曲消遣咱。（做弹科）

..... Who will accompany me this peaceful good night? Only the *pipa* is here to induce a lasting mood... I am quite good at strings and flutes at home, and can also play a few *pipa* songs. When the night falls late and I feel lonely, I'll try to play a piece to amuse myself. [She then plays.]

Meanwhile, as one can see in the image (Figure 3.15), the emperor and his attendant are intently watching her from the background. Although, strictly speaking, the existence of an audience means that her playing cannot be classified as solitary music-making, the nature of the activity should be considered in light of the performer's mindset. In this instance, the woman is performing for her own enjoyment, completely unaware of anyone else, with herself as the sole intended audience. This type of "voyeuristic" portrayal was commonplace in Ming era visual art, likely because it afforded viewers a perspective akin to peering through a keyhole, thereby satisfying the readers' curiosity. Notably, the script does not delve into the details of the woman's music or the lyrics of her songs. Instead, it features the emperor singing several songs, one of which reads as follows:

[油葫芦].....我特来填还你这泪搵湿鲛鱼肖帕，温和你露冷透凌波袜。天生下这艳姿，合是我宠幸他。今宵画烛银台下，剥地管喜信爆灯花。

[To the tune] The Cricket

... I have specially come to pay you back for this tear-drenched mermaid's handkerchief, to warm your cold dew-soaked socks.
Nature cultivated her gorgeous figure, and I should be the one to pamper her.
Tonight, under the painted candles and the silvery moon, the ground is scattered with floriform wicks.³⁰⁴

³⁰⁴ Here, the text literally translates as "bursting floriform wick" (爆灯花 *bao deng hua*), referring to the flower-like shapes formed when a lamp wick burns, which were traditionally considered an auspicious omen.

Similar voyeuristic themes permeate other woodblock paintings from the same era. For example, an illustration accompanying the short story “Scholar Huang is Blessed with Divine Aid” showcases a scholar stealthily observing a young girl playing the *guzheng* zither on a boat (Figure 3.16, above).³⁰⁵ Upon hearing the masterful *guzheng* music, Scholar Huang is entranced, his mind wandering to thoughts of the famed courtesan Xue Qionqiong, renowned for her zither skills:

(黄生) 方欲解衣就寝，忽闻箏声凄婉，其声自中舱而出。黄生披衣起坐，侧耳听之：乍雄乍细，若沉若浮……今日所闻箏声，宛似薛琼琼所弹。黄生暗暗称奇。时夜深人静，舟中俱已睡熟。黄生推篷而起，悄然从窗隙中窥之，见舱中一幼女年未及笄，身穿杏红轻绡，云鬟半髻，娇艳非常。燃兰膏，焚凤脑，纤手如玉，抚箏而弹。须臾曲罢，兰销篆灭，杳无所闻矣。

Just as he was removing his clothes in preparation for bed, the mournful notes of a [*guzheng*] zither from the middle cabin fell upon his ears. He put his clothes back on and sat up to listen.

Now majestic, now gentle,

Now deep-toned, now floating...

Now, this zither player sounded so much like Qionqiong that he marvelled inwardly. In the still of the night, with everyone else in the boat asleep, Scholar Huang pushed open the window and took a peek. He saw a young girl in her early teens. In apricot-pink soft silk clothes, her hair half let down, she was a ravishing beauty. She added fragrant oil to the lamp, lit the incense burner, and began to play her zither again with her slender fingers. After she finished, the lamp dimmed, the incense burned out, and the air was as still as before.³⁰⁶ [Shuhui Yang and Yunqin Yang translation]

³⁰⁵ Feng Menglong, *Xing shi heng yan* 醒世恒言 [Stories to awaken the world], Ming dynasty, 40, National Archives of Japan.

³⁰⁶ Feng Menglong, *Stories to Awaken the World* 醒世恒言 [1627], 750-51.

As described, the zither player prepares for her performance by adding aromatic oil to the lamp and lighting an incense burner, further affirming that this self-oriented performance might function as a means of regulating internal emotions or as a form of self-cultivation.

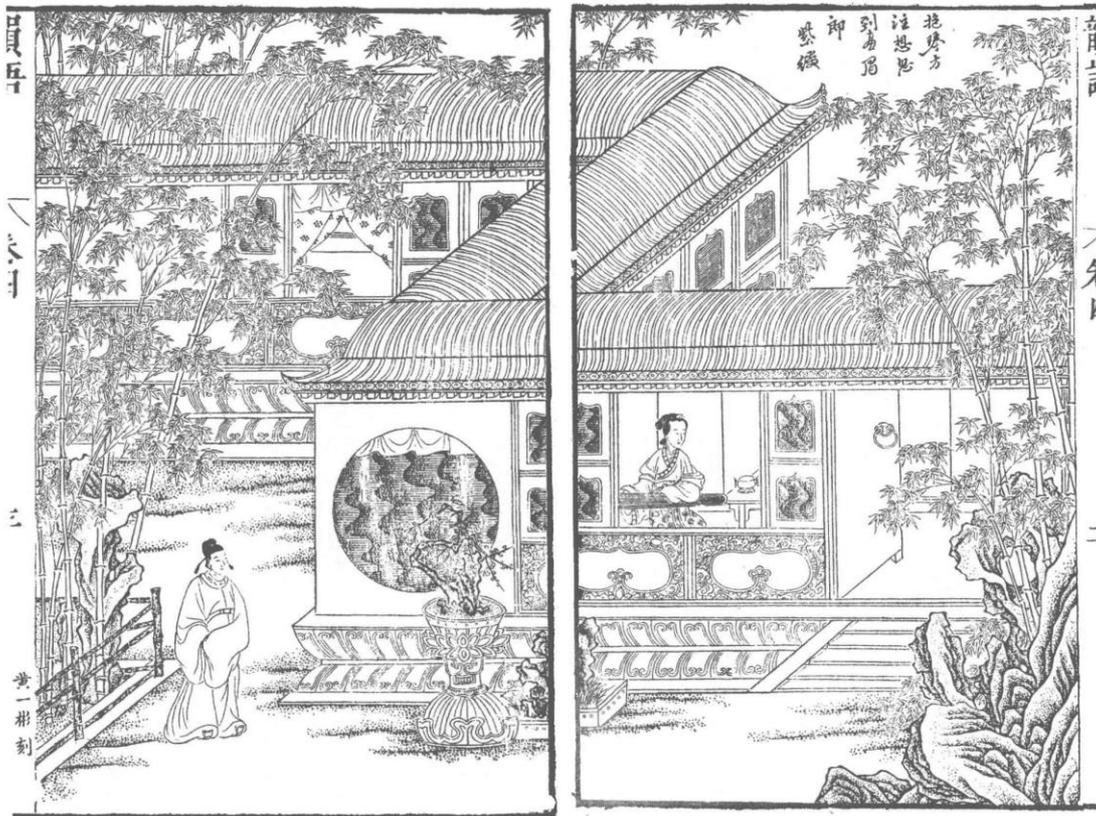


Figure 3.17. A courtesan with her arms resting casually on a *guqin* in a gallery, with a scholar watching her remotely. From *Qinglou Yunyu* 青楼韵语 [Amorous Words in the Green House].

In Ming era written documents, courtesans were most closely associated with recreational stringed instruments, such as the *pipa* and *guzheng*. Meanwhile, the noble *guqin* zither — played primarily by high status males for self-cultivation, again with the performer as the primary audience — is mentioned less frequently in connection with their practices. However, there is compelling evidence that some Ming courtesans did occasionally play the instrument. For instance, Figure 3.17 (above) is a visual representation excerpted from *Qinglou Yunyu* 青楼韵语 (Amorous Words in the Green House), an anthology of Ming poetry compiled by Ming literati Zhu Yuanliang and Zhang Mengzheng. The book was

originally titled “Whoring Scriptures” (嫖经 *piao jing*), detailing the principles in the brothels and, significantly, featuring a large number of poems written by courtesans. This painting depicts a courtesan leaning on a *guqin* zither in a gallery nestled in a garden,³⁰⁷ while the accompanying poem portrays a woman expectantly waiting for her lover:

期至
为爱闲清画，焚香坐绡牀。抱琴方注想，忽到画眉郎。³⁰⁸

Expecting the Arrival

Waiting for my beloved, I leave the elegant paintings aside,
Light the incense and sit on the silken bed.
Holding the *guqin*, I’m just about to ponder,
When the man who paints my eyebrows suddenly arrives.³⁰⁹

The short story “The Courtesans Mourn Liu the Seventh in the Spring Breeze” also mentions the *guqin* when describing the interior of a courtesan’s house:

明窗净几，竹榻茶垆。牀间挂一张名琴，壁上悬一幅古画。香风不散，
宝炉中常爇沉檀；清风逼人，花瓶内频添新水。万卷图书供玩览，一枰
棋局佐欢娱。

A clean table by a bright window, a tea stove by a bamboo couch.
A priceless zither above the bed, an antique painting on the wall.
An undying fragrance: an incense burner never short of sandalwood.
A cool, soothing breeze: a flower vase never out of fresh water.
Ten thousand books for leisurely reading, a chess board for many a pleasant
game.³¹⁰ [Shuhui Yang and Yunqin Yang translation]

³⁰⁷ Zhu Yuanliang and Zhang Mengzhi, *Qinglou yunyu* 青楼韵语 [Amorous words in the green house] (1616), 250-51.

³⁰⁸ Zhu Yuanliang and Zhang Mengzhi, *Qinglou yunyu* 青楼韵语 [Amorous words in the green house] (1616), 252-53.

³⁰⁹ This phrase denotes a loving partner who would be willing to draw a woman’s eyebrows for her. Such an act is a sign of attentive devotion.

³¹⁰ Feng Menglong, *Stories Old and New* 古今小说 [1620], 210-11.

This example amply illustrates how the high-status courtesans' pastimes and tastes were deeply impacted by their close associations with upper-class literati. Of course, it was in their best interests to emulate or pander to their patrons' preferences. The following illustration, Figure 3.18 (below), from *Bai Yong Tu Pu* 百咏图谱 (Pictorial Catalogue of a Hundred Odes on Things), features a woman playing the *guqin* under the moon, accompanied only by a young maid.³¹¹



Figure 3.18. A woman playing *guqin* under the moon. From Gu Zhengyi's 顾正谊 *Bai Yong Tu Pu* 百咏图谱 [Pictorial Catalogue of a Hundred Odes on Things], Hanji 汉籍 [Chinese books], Yamaguchi University Library.

³¹¹ Gu Zhengyi, *Bai yong tu pu* 百咏图谱 [Pictorial catalogue of a hundred odes on things].

Appearing alongside Figure 3.18 (above), the poem “The Beauty Playing Zither under the Moon” 美人月下弹琴 adds further details about the scene:

纤手还调素琴，一弦一拨春心。
卷幔银蟾皎皎，隔窗玉漏沉沉。
香霭光中凤操，水云深处龙吟。
总有文君雅调，东墙若个知音。³¹²

Her delicate hands are still tuning the zither, and every time she strums,
It's like stirring the heart of spring.
Behind the rolled-up curtains, the silvery moon is clear and bright,
Through the window, the sound of the jade water clock is deep and low.
In the fragrant haze and under the light, the phoenix plays [*guqin*],
In the depths where the water and clouds meet, the dragon chants.³¹³
There is always a beauty like Wenjun who can sing elegant tunes,³¹⁴
And several confidants listening over the east wall.

³¹² Gu Zhengyi, *Bai yong tu pu* 百咏图谱 [Pictorial catalogue of a hundred odes on things]: 106.

³¹³ *Long yin* 龙吟, literally meaning “dragon chants”, is often used to describe the sound of wind instruments such as *xiao* flutes.

³¹⁴ The famous beauty of the Western Han dynasty (202-8 BC), Zhuo Wenjun 卓文君 (c. 175 BC-121 BC), was well versed in music, and was especially skilful at playing the zither.



Figure 3.19. A woman sitting on a rock, holding a *xiao* flute while looking up at the sky.
 Wang Zhideng 王穉登, and Chen Jiru 陈继儒, *Wu Sao Ji Si Juan* 吳騷集 四卷 [Songs
 of the Wu Area, Four Volumes], *Jibu* 集部 [Literature], National Central Library, Taipei.

The final example, Figure 3.19 (above), is an illustration from the Ming era *sanqu* collection *Wu Sao Ji* 吳騷集 (Songs of the Wu Area), portraying a woman sitting in a garden together with her *xiao* flute (and a secretly observing young maid). As the accompanying verse indicates, she is striving to engage with the moon, the pear blossoms, and her own *xiao* music in an attempt to assuage her melancholy loneliness: “The cold pear blossoms smile at this sorrowful person; I blow the white jade *xiao* to the moon in vain. 梨花冷把愁人咲，对月空吹白玉箫。”³¹⁵

³¹⁵ Wang Zhideng and Chen Jiru, *Wu sao ji si juan* 吳騷集 四卷 [Songs of the Wu area, four volumes], Late Ming, *Jibu* 集部 [Literature], 105, National Central Library, Taipei.

3.7 Summary

From consulting extensive Ming era primary sources (encompassing extended fiction, short stories, contemporary accounts, treatises, poetry anthologies, and a wealth of associated visual representations), this chapter has pieced together the “bigger picture” of the courtesans’ performance practices – revealing the full range of contexts that they commonly performed in, the styles of delivery they favoured, and the various forms of interaction that characterised each type of musical activity. I believe that such a broad view, which has been missing from previous Ming courtesan scholarship, is required if one seeks to forge an accurate assessment of the courtesans’ artistry – properly acknowledging the breadth of their skills, the multi-faceted nature of their performing lives, and, crucially, the versatility that they fostered. In this chapter, I have sought not only to pinpoint the broad range of their musical activities but also propose a suitable system for categorising those activities.

To begin, I summarised and compared the two primary styles of music (*qu*) – northern and southern – reflecting the Ming era literati’s own preoccupation with their developmental histories, defining musical characteristics, instrumentation, and perceived pros and cons. In short, the northern *qu* was generally stereotyped as heroic and lively, with fast tempi and reliance on stringed instruments for accompaniment, while the southern *qu* was stereotyped as elegant and melodious, with slower tempi, an emphasis on showcasing the human voice’s ability to create emotive nuance, and accompaniment mainly provided by *xiao* flutes, percussion instruments such as clappers, or occasionally the *pipa*. By the middle/late Ming dynasty, music connoisseurs had developed an almost obsessive preoccupation with the expressive potential of the human voice, with Wei Liangfu’s stylistic reforms stressing the artful conveyance of the song text’s meaning and further fuelling the popularity of southern-style “pure singing” (*qingchang* 清唱) in private realms.

Thereafter, in my appraisal of the courtesans’ diverse performance activities, I discern four main categories, based primarily on criteria of scale, context, and degree of openness to the public (see Table 3.2, below): performances at large public gatherings, performances at private gatherings only for invited participants, performances at intimate gatherings with very limited participants, and courtesans’ solitary music-making.

Performance Contexts	Types of gathering (and typical musical components)	Features
Large public gatherings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gatherings for the evaluation of courtesans • Gatherings of literati societies • Festivals <p>(Involving a diverse range of genres. Mainly presentational in nature.)</p>	<p>Ambience: mainly lively and bustling</p> <p>Participants: often over a hundred</p> <p>Restrictions: minimal restrictions placed on participants' status/identity</p>
Private gatherings, only for invited participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gatherings in private homes • Gatherings in courtesan houses • Private gatherings in outdoor spaces, such as garden parties and boating parties <p>(Variously involving song with accompaniment, pure singing, ensemble music, and dance. Ranging widely from presentational to participatory/collaborative.)</p>	<p>Ambience: shifting, ranging from tranquil/meditative to lively/boisterous</p> <p>Participants: a close-knit group, ranging from small to large</p> <p>Restrictions: exclusive – only for close associates, with strict restrictions based on status/identity</p>
Intimate gatherings, for very limited participants	<p>As above, but in a greatly reduced format. Mostly at night, with an intimate seating arrangement.</p> <p>(Involving solo instrument playing or solo singing, sometimes with accompaniment. Presentational or collaborative)</p>	<p>Ambience: mainly tranquil, romantic, passionate</p> <p>Participants: minimal (often just one performer and another individual)</p> <p>Restrictions: only intimates</p>
Courtesans' solitary music-making	<p>N/A – communing only with oneself and the surrounding environment, within a private room or outside in a garden or terrace</p> <p>(Solo instrument playing or singing, sometimes self-accompanied)</p>	<p>Ambience: introspective, focusing on inner mood</p>

Table 3.2: Four categories of courtesans' performance activities.

As shown above, working within these four primary context-categories, the courtesans made music for diverse types of gathering, in widely varying settings (both indoors and outdoors and characterised by various target ambiances), and with groups of varying size and constitution. Furthermore, applying Thomas Turino's schema (2008), we can discern that the courtesans had to be skilled at switching between various presentational and participatory modes of performance contingent upon the distinct contexts in which they were performing, associated conventions of interaction, and others' needs and desires of the moment – another key finding of this systematic comparative study. Thus, in the sources, one variously encounters the following: wholly presentational performances to non-contributing observers; episodes where others make interjections, offer suggestions, provide oral and gestural feedback, and sometimes even take centre-stage as performers; and episodes of musical collaboration between courtesans and their clients.

Also in this chapter, I argue that the courtesans' contributions in private contexts played a vital role in enhancing a sense of exclusivity. Only certain people were permitted to enter, through payment or invitation, and great lengths were taken to transform what were otherwise mundane everyday spaces (indoors or outdoors) into transcendental arenas. The guests would expect to have unparalleled experiences in these intimate realms, where they could be immune from the daily grind and social obligations.³¹⁶

In sum, such a diverse range of performance contexts, spanning from public spaces to the most private chambers, necessitated a high degree of adaptability on the part of the courtesans. They were unceasingly tasked with tailoring their performance style and repertoire in alignment with specific scenarios, environmental ambience, and the tastes, desires, and expectations of the guests. And I posit that the unique, unrepeatability nature of each performance must have added greatly to its allure.

³¹⁶ As He Yuming points out, the productive and generative nature of the performance spaces in which these female artists are situated provides a limited immunity from the social obligations for the participants. He, "Productive space: Performance texts in the late Ming," 11-13.

4. *Qing* and Emotion in the Courtesans' Realm

In Ming period popular literature, one notices frequent mentions of *zhen qing* 真情, which can be literally translated as “sincere emotions” or “genuine feelings”. This emphasis on *zhen qing* and the quest for “genuineness” stemmed from a pervasive trend within the literati circles of the era. During the middle and late Ming, the eminent literatus Feng Menglong (1574-1646) introduced the notion of the “religion of *qing* (emotion)”. This gave rise to the prevailing ideological trend where “*qing* as priority” resonated across the nation and significantly influenced literary and art circles. The principle of “*qing* as priority” accentuates secular emotions, notably the passionate love between men and women, as a means of enlightening the people.³¹⁷ This ideological movement contends that the authentic emotional bond between men and women forms the foundation of all societal relationships.³¹⁸ Such an elevation of “genuine emotion” prompted the literati to move away from classical literature, such as poetics that traditionally dominated mainstream thought. Instead, they celebrated popular literature deeply rooted in urban civilian life. Contrary to traditional poetics, which was governed by the archaic Confucian orthodoxy advocating social hierarchy and familial bonds, an increasing number of literati opined that popular literary and art forms like novels and vernacular folk songs embodied genuine emotions. As expected, these popular musical forms, including folk songs and ditties, found their way from urban centres to brothels. Thus, songs replete with *qing* and perceived authenticity began circulating amongst prostitutes and courtesans and were eventually documented in written form by literati who frequented these entertainment locales.

Before delving into Ming courtesanship's interplay with the ideological trends of *qing*, several considerations must be addressed. How do we define the Chinese term *qing* and how

³¹⁷ Feng Jialin, "Feng Menglong qingjiao sixiang yu sanyan bianzuan 冯梦龙“情教”思想与“三言”编撰 [Feng Menglong's thoughts about ‘love’ and the ‘sanyan’ compilation]," *Wenyi pinglun* 文艺评论 4 (2015): 32.

³¹⁸ Chu Zhuyan, "Cong xiaoshuo yu xiqu de bijiao shijiao kan Feng Menglong de qingjiao sixiang 从小说与戏曲的比较视角看冯梦龙的“情教”思想 [On Feng Menglong's ‘cult of emotion’ from the comparative perspective of novels and dramas]," *Zhongnan minzu daxue xuebao* 中南民族大学学报 34 (2014): 152.

did its definition evolve during different periods of imperial China? With evolutions in Chinese mainstream ideology (especially Confucianism), how did people's understandings of *qing* change? In this chapter, firstly I discuss these issues. Secondly, I analyse how *qing* is embedded and presented in the Ming era courtesans' music.

4.1 What is *Qing*?

To fully grasp the nuances of *qing* 情, it is crucial to delve into this Chinese character and its related terms. Its left radical stands for *xin* 心, denoting “heart” or “mind”, signifying *qing*'s connection to emotions. The right segment, *qing* 青, symbolizing “green” or “blueness”, corresponds to its pronunciation. The Xinhua Dictionary defines *qing* 情 as emotions, feelings such as love, hate, happiness, unhappiness, and fear; psychological states evoked by external stimuli; sensibility; mutual affection; and condition.³¹⁹

When translating *qing*, western scholars exhibit varied preferences. Common English translations include Halvor Eifring's (2003) “emotion”, Paolo Santangelo's (2000) “love”, and Katherine Carlitz's (2007) “passion”.³²⁰ In Eifring's 2003 work, *Love and Emotions in Traditional Chinese Literature*, he contrasts western emotional concepts with the Chinese notion of *qing*. He outlines various western terms for “emotion” across languages, such as “emotion”, “feeling”, and “sentiment” in English, counterparts in German, French, and Russian, highlighting their centrality in enlightenment and romanticist thought.³²¹

In contemporary Chinese, *qing* is often paired with other characters to yield nuanced expressions. A few frequently used modern Chinese terms incorporating the character include: *ganqing* 感情 (feeling, affection, sentiment), *qinggan* 情感 (emotion), *qingxu* 情绪 (mood, sentiment), *xingqing* 性情 (disposition, temperament, sensibility), *shuqing* 抒情

³¹⁹ Xinhua Dictionary, (Beijing: The Commercial Press, 2000), 409.

³²⁰ Katherine Carlitz, "Meng Chenshun Leaves Passion Behind: Three Plays (1620-1660)," *Rivista degli studi orientali* 78 (2007); Paolo Santangelo, "The Cult of Love in Some Texts of Ming and Qing Literature," *East and West* 50, no. 1/4 (2000); Halvor Eifring, *Love and Emotions in Traditional Chinese Literature*, Sinica Leidensia, (Leiden: Brill, 2003).

³²¹ Eifring, *Love and Emotions in Traditional Chinese Literature*, 2.

(expressing emotion), *aiqing* 爱情 (love, affection), and *shiqing* 事情 (matter, affair). These combinations convey varied nuances and emotional undertones.

Several pivotal concepts closely related to *qing* warrant discussion to avoid confusion.³²²

Chinese terms	English translations
<i>Xing</i> 性	human nature, inborn nature; sex; function
<i>Qing</i> 情	emotion, sentiment; sensibility
<i>Yu</i> 欲	desire, lust; want
<i>Yin</i> 淫	obscene; licentious, excessive
<i>Ai</i> 爱	love; care about

Table 4.1: The pivotal concepts that closely related to *qing*.

However, in pre-modern Chinese contexts, the term *qing* typically stands alone, unpaired with other characters. Yet this does not imply simplistic interpretations. In Yuedi Liu's study of *qing*'s role in Chinese Confucian philosophy, *qing* takes on three dimensions within the Confucian context: *qingxing* 情性 (human nature), *qingshi* 情实 (reality, fact, situations), and *qinggan* 情感 (emotion, sentiment, affection).³²³ The exploration of *qing* as “facts” and “situations” diverges into a different domain and warrants its own analysis; hence, this study only focuses on *qing*'s interpretations as “human nature” and “emotion”.

The inherent meanings of “*qing*” have changed across epochs, contexts, and genres. Thus, when addressing its multifaceted meanings, this study does not strive for exhaustiveness. Subsequent sections will dissect the intricate connotations of *qing*, probing its multiple interpretations as “sentiment or emotion”, “desire”, and “love and passion” in pre-modern Chinese contexts.

³²² *Xinhua Dictionary*.

³²³ Liu Yuedi, "Qingxing, qingshi he qinggan: zhongguo rujia qingben zhexue de jiben mianxiang '情性'、'情实' 和'情感' ——中国儒家'情本哲学'的基本面向 [‘Qingxing’, ‘qingshi’ and ‘qinggan’: the basic aspects of Chinese Confucian ‘qing-based philosophy’],” *Shehui kexuejia* 社会科学家 2 (2018): 12.

4.2 The Relationship between *Qing* and *Xing*

Before delving into the nuanced meanings of *qing*, it is imperative to define *xing* 性 in the Chinese context, which translates as “human nature” or “one’s innate disposition”.

Intriguingly, early Chinese texts do not distinctly separate the concepts of *qing* and *xing*; their foundational definitions bear strong resemblances.³²⁴ Chinese scholar Xu Fuguan posits that, during the pre-Qin period, *qing* and *xing* were largely indistinguishable and could be used interchangeably.³²⁵ However, alternative research presents compelling evidence that, prior to 206 B.C., the terms were not wholly synonymous.³²⁶

Eifring outlines a distilled progression detailing the emergence of emotions from rudimentary instincts, culminating in the apex of human emotion: “love”.³²⁷

basic instincts → emotions → positive feelings of intimacy → love

Several pertinent questions arise: if *qing*, in many contexts, aligns with human nature and could even replace the term *xing*, what nuanced distinctions separate *xing* and *qing*? Moreover, how do we differentiate between the expressions of *qing* in its primal form (as human nature or basic instincts) and its subsequent form (as emotion and sentiment)?

In the context of the pre-Qin era (before 221 B.C.), the dominant Confucian perspective posits that “*qing* arises from *xing*”. The phrase *xing zi ming chu* 性自命出 from the *Xian Qin Chu Jian* 先秦楚简 (Bamboo Slips of Chu Tombs at Guodian), a pivotal Confucian text from the Warring States Period (475-221 B.C.), offers insight into the Confucian

³²⁴ Liu Yuedi, "Qingxing, qingshi he qinggan: zhongguo rujia qingben zhexue de jiben mianxiang '情性'、'情实'和'情感'——中国儒家'情本哲学'的基本面向 [‘Qingxing’, ‘qingshi’ and ‘qinggan’: the basic aspects of Chinese Confucian ‘qing-based philosophy’],” 19.

³²⁵ Xu Fuguan, *Zhongguo renxing lun shi (xianqin pian)* 中国人性论史 (先秦篇) [History of Chinese human nature (Pre-Qin)] (Shanghai: East China Normal University Press, 2005), 141.

³²⁶ Martin W. Huang, "Sentiments of Desire: Thoughts on the Cult of Qing in Ming-Qing Literature," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)* 20 (1998): 154, <https://doi.org/10.2307/495268>, www.jstor.org/stable/495268.

³²⁷ Here, I refer to Eifring’s interpretation of semantic changes on *qing* in traditional Chinese literature. See Eifring, *Love and Emotions in Traditional Chinese Literature*, 11.

interpretation of *qing* during the pre-Qin period: “*Dao* 道 (social norms) originates in *qing* (emotion), and *qing* stems from *xing* (human nature)” [道始于情, 情生于性]. This passage essentially conveys that *dao* – the guiding principles of personal and societal behaviour – is intrinsically grounded in the collective emotions of people, and that *qing* is an outgrowth of human nature.³²⁸

Typically, *dao* in Taoist contexts refers to the *dao* of heaven, denoting the universe and its cosmic consciousness. However, in the pre-Qin Confucian perspective, *dao* refers more specifically to social norms and the ways of being human. The central question is: why does *xing zi ming chu* frame the relationship between *qing* and *xing* as “*qing* arises from *xing*”? Scholars suggest that the subtle difference between *xing* and *qing* lies in the fact that *xing* embodies the inherent nature of humans, while *qing* denotes the dynamic emotional reactions to external stimuli and the innate human inclination towards such responses.³²⁹

However, such outward expression of emotion can also be perceived as a latent threat, potentially unleashing the malevolent side of human nature. Some claim that Chinese Confucianism views *qing* as a hazard that could compromise societal norms and harmony.³³⁰ Yet, traditional Confucianism – particularly that of the pre-Qin era – appreciates *qing*, deeming it the bedrock for preserving familial and societal harmony. Confucianism’s actual critique is directed at an excessive manifestation of *qing*, which might culminate in hedonism and desire, consequently destabilizing society.

³²⁸ Yijie Tang, Brian Bruya, and Hai-ming Wen, "Emotion in Pre-Qin Ruist Moral Theory: An Explanation of "Dao Begins in Qing", " *Philosophy East and West* 53, no. 2 (2003): 271, www.jstor.org/stable/1400093.

³²⁹ Eifring, *Love and Emotions in Traditional Chinese Literature*, 12. Tang, Bruya, and Wen, "Emotion in Pre-Qin Ruist Moral Theory: An Explanation of "Dao Begins in Qing", " 275.

³³⁰ For example, the Western Han Confucian scholar Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (B.C.179–B.C. 104) believed that *qing* had negative ethical values and could be potentially evil. See: Cao Xiaohu, "Rujia 'qing' de guannian de fazhan jiqi yu fo dao guanxi 儒家'情'的观念的发展及其与佛、道关系 [The development of the Confucian concept of *qing* and its relationship with Buddhism and Taoism], " *Zhongzhou xuekan* 中州学刊 2 (2004): 132.

4.3 *Qing* and Emotion

In pre-Qin China (prior to 221 B.C.), the value of human emotions was recognized and championed, which can be traced back to Confucius' (551-479 B.C.) advocacy for familial intimacy. While Confucius did not explicitly define *qing* as “emotion”, he indeed esteemed the *qing* that existed within families as a vital bond of kinship.³³¹ In his perspective, *qing* predominantly symbolized *qingshi* 情实 (fact, reality, situation). However, he perceived *qing*, representing the affirmative sentiments within relationships, as the cornerstone of his core principle — *ren* 仁 (benevolence, sincerity, and kindness). When prompted by a disciple to define *ren*, Confucius responded with an ethos of altruism: “It is to love all men.” [樊迟问仁。子曰：“爱人”].³³² It is this sincere and positive emotion among individuals that serves as the genesis of benevolence.

Zhuangzi 庄子 (369-286 B.C.), another pre-Qin scholar, was also an advocate of the concept of *qing*. As a Taoist scholar, he was among the first to align *qing* with “emotion” in his discourses on sages: “(The sage) possesses the physical form of a man, yet lacks the *qing* (emotion) typical of others. While he retains a human form, allowing him to integrate with the masses, the absence of human *qing* ensures he remains unswayed by their approvals or disapprovals.” [有人之形，无人之情。有人之形，故群于人；无人之情，故是非不得于身].³³³ Eifring notes that in this context, *qing* correlates with emotional tendencies towards preference or aversion.³³⁴

One of the earliest Chinese scholars to elucidate the definition of *qing* was the Confucianist from the Warring States Period, Xunzi 荀子 (313-230 B.C.). He posited, “the inherent feelings of liking and disliking, of delight and anger, and of sorrow and joy that are

³³¹ Cao Xiaohu, "Rujia 'qing' de guannian de fazhan jiqi yu fo dao guanxi 儒家'情'的观念的发展及其与佛、道关系 [The development of the Confucian concept of qing and its relationship with Buddhism and Taoism]," 130.

³³² Li Xiaonan, "Lun xianqin rujia qing sixiang jiqi dangdai jiazhi 论先秦儒家'情'思想及其当代价值 [A study of pre-Qin Confucian 'qing' and its contemporary value]" (Master's thesis Jilin Normal University, 2016), 10.

³³³ Zhuang Zhou, "Neipian de chong fu 内篇·德充符 [Inner chapters: The seal of virtue complete]," in *Zhuangzi* 庄子, ed. Fang Yong (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2010), 90.

³³⁴ Eifring, *Love and Emotions in Traditional Chinese Literature*, 15.

ingrained in our nature are termed *qing*” [性之好，恶，喜，怒，哀，乐，谓之情].³³⁵ For Xunzi, *qing* represented the outward expression of one’s intrinsic feelings. Furthermore, Xunzi held the view that human nature, in its essence, is malevolent. Consequently, if one does not temper and govern this inherent nature and its innate emotions, it can lead to undesirable outcomes:³³⁶

然则从人之性，顺人之情，必出于争夺，合于犯分乱理，而归于暴。

When individuals yield to their nature and succumb to their emotions, it results in conflict, transgressing social conventions and disturbing the established etiquette, thereby culminating in chaos.

Another early Chinese reference, elucidating the concept of *qing* as human emotion, is a text of uncertain authorship from the Warring States Period, which reads:³³⁷

何谓人情？喜怒哀惧爱恶欲七者，弗学而能。

What constitutes human *qing*? Delight, anger, sorrow, fear, love, aversion, and desire – these seven emotions emerge instinctively, without being taught.

While this text enumerates more emotions than Xunzi’s account, both sources characterize *qing* as the foundational emotions inherent in human nature. In this context, *qing* epitomizes the primal emotions innate to humans.

³³⁵ Xunzi and John Knoblock, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, vol. 3 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 127.

³³⁶ Cao Xiaohu, "Rujia 'qing' de guannian de fazhan jiqi yu fo dao guanxi 儒家'情'的观念的发展及其与佛、道关系 [The development of the Confucian concept of qing and its relationship with Buddhism and Taoism]," 132.

³³⁷ From the Confucian classic *Liji. Liyun* 礼记.礼运. Quoted from *Shisan jing jinzhu jinyi* 十三经今注今译 [The thirteen sutras with current annotations and translations]. Vol. 1 (Changsha: Yuelu Shushe, 1994), 818.

4.4 *Qing* and *Yu*

In English contexts, potential equivalents for the Chinese term *yu* 欲 include “desire”, “lust”, and “will”.³³⁸ Although *qing* and *yu* are both emotional revealing of human nature in response to the presence (or stimulation) of external substances, the character for *qing* does not encompass the notion of “possession”. In contrast, *yu* inherently carries the connotation of “possession” or “acquisition”. Xunzi’s understanding of the relationship between *qing* and *yu* leads him to assert that “*yu* (desires) are the responses of *qing*” [欲者，情之应也].³³⁹ In a broader sense, *qing* contains the meaning of *yu*.

Historically, both *qing* and *yu* were sometimes perceived as potentially malevolent forces, often resulting in adverse outcomes if unchecked by moral restraint. Among the two, *yu* was frequently regarded as the more perilous. The pre-Qin scholar Mozi 墨子 (468-376 B.C.) posited that the inherent *yu* (desire) in human nature could incite divisive conflicts and disputes.³⁴⁰ Approximately a century later, influenced by Mozi’s assertion that “*yu* is malignant”, Xunzi proposed the theory that “human nature is innately malevolent”.³⁴¹ Fast-forwarding a millennium, during the Song era, the neo-Confucianist Zhuxi’s 朱熹 (1130-1200) exhibited an even more stringent aversion toward *yu*:

性是未动，情是已动，心包得已动未动。盖心之未动则为性，已动则为情，所谓‘心统性情’也。欲是情发出来底。心如水，性犹水之静，情则水之流，欲则水之波澜，但波澜有好底，有不好底。欲之好底，如“我欲仁”之类；不好底，则一向奔驰出去，若波涛翻浪；大段不好底欲则灭却天理，如水之壅决，无所不害。

Nature (*xing*) is the state before activity begins, the feelings (*qing*) are the state when activity has started, and the mind includes both of these states. For nature is the mind before it is aroused, while feelings are the mind after it is aroused, as is expressed in

³³⁸ *Xinhua Dictionary*, (Beijing: The Commercial Press, 2000), 599.

³³⁹ Xunzi and Knoblock, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, 3, 136.

³⁴⁰ Du Fan, "Xunzi qing guannian yanjiu 荀子‘情’观念研究 [A study of Xunzi’s ‘qing’ thought]" (Master's thesis Nanjing University, 2015), 12-13.

³⁴¹ Du Fan, "Xunzi qing guannian yanjiu 荀子‘情’观念研究 [A study of Xunzi’s ‘qing’ thought]," 13.

Zhang Zai's (1020-1077) saying, "The mind commands man's nature and feelings." Desire (*yu*) emanates from feelings. The mind is comparable to water, nature is comparable to the tranquillity of still water, feeling (*qing*) is comparable to the flow of the water, and desire is comparable to its waves. Just as there are good and bad waves, so there are good desires, such as when "I want humanity," and bad desires which rush out like wild and violent waves. When bad desires are substantial, they will destroy the Principle of Heaven, as water bursts a dam and damages everything.

While Zhuxi did not explicitly condemn *qing*, he suggested that *qing* could potentially give rise to malevolence. He employed the analogy of flowing water and its waves to illustrate that unchecked or excessive *qing* might foster malevolent *yu*, leading to subsequent harm. This suspicion Zhuxi harboured towards *yu* was aligned with his stringent doctrine, which can be summarized as "preserve heavenly principle, extinguish human desire" [存天理, 灭人欲]. Prior to the widespread acceptance of Wang Yangming's 王阳明 (1472-1529) Philosophy of Mind, Zhuxi's sceptical views on desire profoundly shaped later scholars' dismissive attitudes towards both *qing* and *yu*.³⁴² By the time these notions evolved into the Ming dynasty, *yu* was commonly framed in a negative context, making it challenging for some to revalorize its intrinsic meaning.³⁴³

4.5 *Qing* and Romantic Love

From the foregoing, it is evident that in Chinese classical canons, *qing* is predominantly defined as "emotion" or "feeling" – something that lives within one's nature, which can occasionally be evoked by external stimuli. Given this, does *qing* encompass the sentiments of romantic and passionate love? When might *qing* specifically refer to love?

In western scholarship, "love" is clearly positioned. It is broadly construed as a basic emotion intertwined with three interrelated behaviours (attachment, caregiving, and sex).³⁴⁴

³⁴² Huang, "Sentiments of Desire: Thoughts on the Cult of Qing in Ming-Qing Literature," 158.

³⁴³ Huang, "Sentiments of Desire: Thoughts on the Cult of Qing in Ming-Qing Literature."

³⁴⁴ Phillip R. Shaver, Hillary J. Morgan, and Shelley Wu, "Is Love a "Basic" Emotion?," *Personal Relationships*

In addition, “love” usually refers to the emotion of favouring someone, which can sometimes engender conflicting moral demands.³⁴⁵ Conversely, in classical Chinese treatises about *qing*, the position of love as a feeling remains nebulous. At times, it is delineated as one among various forms of *qing*, while in other instances, it is noticeably absent.³⁴⁶ For instance, while the Confucian classic *lijì* 礼记 (The Book of Rites) enumerates love as a distinct emotion within the spectrum of *qing*, such a designation is conspicuously absent in Xunzi’s discourse.³⁴⁷ Within similar contexts, love is often less frequently mentioned compared to other emotions and, in numerous discussions, it can even be excluded from the categorization of emotions altogether:

While there are no stirrings of pleasure, anger, sorrow, or joy, the mind may be said to be in the state of equilibrium. 喜怒哀乐之未发, 谓之中。³⁴⁸

Aversion and desire, joy and anger, sorrow and delight... 恶欲喜怒哀乐...³⁴⁹

Great joy, great anger, great grief, great fear, great sorrow... 大喜大怒大忧大恐大哀...³⁵⁰

The noted ambiguity underscores the peripheral status of romantic love in traditional Chinese moral and philosophical discourses. Rarely is romantic love situated at the heart of the

3, no. 1 (1996): 81. Kate Abramson and Adam Leite, "Love as a Reactive Emotion," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 61, no. 245 (2011): 673, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9213.2011.716.x>, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9213.2011.716.x>.

³⁴⁵ David J. Velleman, "Love as a Moral Emotion," *Ethics* 109, no. 2 (1999): 338, <https://doi.org/10.1086/233898>, <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/233898>.

³⁴⁶ Eifring, *Love and Emotions in Traditional Chinese Literature*, 28-30.

³⁴⁷ In *Liji* 礼记 (Book of Rites), love is included in the spectrum of *qing*: “delight, anger, sorrow, fear, love, aversion, and desire (are *qing*)” [喜怒哀乐惧爱恶欲]. Xunzi proposes that, “the feelings of liking and disliking, of delight and anger, and of sorrow and joy that are inborn in our nature are called ‘emotions’” [性之好, 恶, 喜, 怒, 哀, 乐, 谓之情]. Chen Hu and Jin Xiaodong, *Liji jishuo* 礼记集说 [Collected commentaries on the book of rites] (Shanghai: Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House, 2016), 258.

³⁴⁸ From the Confucian classic *Liji • Zhongyong* 礼记 • 中庸 (Book of Rites • Doctrine of the Mean). Wang Guoxuan, *Daxue zhongyong yizhu* 大学·中庸译注 [The great Learning and the doctrine of the mean: translations and annotations] (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2006), 46.

³⁴⁹ Zhuangzi, *Zhuangzi yinde* 庄子引得 (Shanghai: Shanghai Chinese Classics Publishing House, 1986).

³⁵⁰ Lü Buwei, *Lüshi chunqiu jishi* 吕氏春秋集释 [Collected commentaries on the annals of Lü Buwei] (Taipei: Shijie Shuju, 1988), 148.

concept of *qing*. One plausible reason for this might be that, in Chinese classical treatises, romantic love between couples was not deemed significant enough to parallel moral and philosophical deliberations.

While romantic love is seldom championed in orthodox Chinese classics, it remains a prevalent theme in popular literature. Indeed, *qing*, when construed as romantic love, is a recurring motif in Chinese popular literature, including folk songs, dramas, and fiction. Chinese literary canons typically emphasize traditional poetics; in contrast, popular literature has never been the focal point of orthodox Chinese literature, often due to perceptions of its diminished stature. The appeal – and occasionally the perceived coarseness – of popular literature led the elite class to dismiss this genre from the pantheon of classical Chinese literature. Nevertheless, operating outside the purview of elite discourse, popular literature often exercised greater creative liberties, both in genre and thematic exploration, making “love” one of its recurrent subjects.³⁵¹

The earliest association of *qing* with love can be traced back to the *Shijing* 诗经 (The Book of Songs), an anthology of ancient Chinese folk songs compiled between approximately 1100-600 B.C. While love remains a pivotal theme throughout the *Shijing*, specific terms like *qing* or *ai* 爱 (love) rarely appear. *Qing* is notably mentioned only in one verse: “I cherish such a love for you, but hardly can my dreams come true.” [洵有情兮，而无望兮].³⁵² Owing to the temporal distance, the nuanced connotations and specific interpretations of these folk songs have become elusive, leading to varied scholarly interpretations over time. Some propose that in this particular verse, *qing* signifies love or, at the very least, positive sentiments towards a beloved.³⁵³ It is evident that even before *qing* acquired a distinct connotation of “romantic love”, it was already employed to articulate affectionate sentiments towards others.

³⁵¹ Eifring, *Love and Emotions in Traditional Chinese Literature*, 25-26.

³⁵² Cheng Junying and Jiang Jianyuan, *Shijing* 诗经 [Book of poetry], trans. Wang Rongpei (Changsha: Hunan People's Publishing House, 2008), 234-35.

³⁵³ Scholars debating on whether the meaning of *qing* in this verse is “love, admiration” or “licentiousness”. Here I agree with the former interpretation. See Eifring, *Love and Emotions in Traditional Chinese Literature*, 16. Lü Hualiang, “Yi wu jie qing fengsu yu shijing chen feng zhong de wudao aiqing shi ‘以舞结情’风俗与《诗经·陈风》中的舞蹈爱情诗 [The custom of ‘expressing love by dancing’ and the dancing love poems in the Book of Songs],” *Yindu xuekan* 殷都学刊 2 (2018): 74.

The use of *qing* to signify love became prevalent with the rise and popularity of the Tang Tales (*chuanqi* 传奇), a literary genre of fictional short stories. Initially gaining traction as short narrative tales during the Tang era (618-690), Tang Tales evolved into drama scripts by the Ming and Qing dynasties. One of the most notable works in this genre is *Yingying Zhuan* 莺莺传 (Yingying's Story) by Yuan Zhen 元稹 (779-831), which serves as the precursor to the renowned Yuan era (1271-1368) drama, *Xi Xiang Ji* 西厢记 (Romance of the Western Chamber).³⁵⁴ *Xi Xiang Ji* garnered widespread admiration and significantly influenced subsequent drama writing in the Ming era. The narrative chronicles the romantic relationship between Zhang Sheng, a budding scholar, and Cui Yingying, a minister's daughter from the Tang court. In *Yingying Zhuan*, the term *qing* is frequently employed, and in this context, it clearly denotes a distinct emotional connotation – that of romantic and passionate love:

捧览来问，抚爱过深。儿女之情，悲喜交集。

I received what you sent, asking after me. The comforting love (*ai*) you show is all too deep. In the feelings (*qing* as “love”) between man and woman, joys and sorrows mingle.

.....

愚陋之情，永谓终托。

In the folly of my passion (*qing*) I thought that I would remain in your care forever.

.....

戏调初微拒，柔情已暗通。

When he flirted, at first she gently refused,

but in secret soft passions (*qing*) already conveyed.³⁵⁵ [Stephen Owen translation]

In the above examples, the term *qing* is present in each sentence, and in the English translations, it is rendered as either “love” or “passion”. In this context, *qing* is no longer representative of human emotion in general; rather, it specifically denotes affectionate feelings and passionate love between lovers.

³⁵⁴ Manling Luo, "The Seduction of Authenticity: "The Story of Yingying", " *Nan nü* 7, no. 1 (2005): 40-41.

³⁵⁵ English translations refer to Stephen Owen, *An anthology of Chinese literature: Beginnings to 1911* (New York; London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1996), 540-49.

4.6 *Qing* in the Ming Context

From the middle to the late Ming, as capitalism emerged in the socio-economic landscape, there was also a rise in the ideological emancipation of idealism and humanism in intellectual spheres. This movement towards liberation and the emerging aesthetic orientation challenged the dogmatic aesthetics of the era, broadening the theoretical perspectives of the time.³⁵⁶ Furthermore, pivotal social changes, such as the peasant uprising at the end of the Ming era and the subsequent fall of the Ming regime, significantly revitalized intellectual discourse.³⁵⁷ Concurrently, with the spread of Wang Yangming's Philosophy of Mind, luminaries like Li Zhi 李贽 (1527-1602), Tang Xianzu 汤显祖 (1550-1616), and Feng Menglong emphasized the importance of *qing* and *zhen* 真 (authenticity) in ideological and aesthetic discussions. This intellectual class increasingly showcased their pursuit of individual liberation and self-worth.³⁵⁸ Influenced by these socio-cultural shifts, the Ming era scholars' appreciation and veneration of *qing* grew, resulting in a distinctive *qing*-centric aesthetic movement in Ming literature and art circles.

Wang Yangming's Philosophy of Mind, predominant in the mid-to-late Ming period, advocated that "mind is the principle 心即理", and harboured a favourable view of *qing* and its influence on individuals. This stood in stark contrast to Zhu Xi's *lixue* 理学 (Philosophy of Principle, or neo-Confucianism), which endorsed "preserving nature's principles while curtailing human desires". The Philosophy of Mind posited that human desires were not antithetical to nature's principles; rather, human *qing* and *yu* could be embraced, even seen as having a beneficial influence on people. The prevalence of Philosophy of Mind profoundly shaped the era's ideological currents. It not only contested the rigid traditionalism epitomized by neo-Confucianism but also validated and grounded the humanistic and realistic tenets inherent in the concept of *qing*.³⁵⁹

³⁵⁶ Ye Lang, *Zhongguo meixue shi dagang* 中国美学史大纲 [Outline of the history of Chinese aesthetics] (Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 1985), 9.

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

³⁵⁸ Wang Tan and Zhang Pengzhen, "Feng Menglong Shan'ge zhong yunhan de zhuqing sixiang zhi guankui 冯梦龙《山歌》中蕴含的'主情'思想之管窥 [A peek into Feng Menglong's thoughts about 'qing' contained in 'mountain songs']," *Minzu yilin* 民族艺林 01 (2020): 88.

³⁵⁹ Xiao Ying, "Yi tong qingzhi de Wang Yangming meixue 意统情志的王阳明美学 [Wang Yangming's

Succeeding Wang Yangming, Li Zhi became the pioneering Ming scholar to champion the value of “genuineness”. His emphasis on *zhenqing* 真情 (genuine feelings) and his advocacy for sincerity deeply impacted the late-Ming *qing*-centric artistic ethos. Li Zhi elucidated his understanding in his treatise, *tongxin shuo* 童心说 (Theory of Preserving Childlike Innocence):

夫童心者，绝假纯真，最初一念之本心也。若失却童心，便失却真心，便失却真人。人而非真，不复有初也。³⁶⁰

The term “childlike innocence” refers to a genuine and absolutely sincere state of mind, unadulterated by external influences, embodying the original mind in its purest form. Losing one’s childlike innocence equates to losing one’s genuine mind, and consequently, the essence of what it means to be a true person. When individuals stray from the foundation of sincerity, they are at risk of losing the completeness of their personalities that they inherently possess.

Here, the “genuine and absolutely sincere state of mind” refers to the inherent nature of human beings, characterized by absolute sincerity and absence of disguise. Li Zhi emphasized that both adults and children possess childlike innocence; however, many are obscured and tainted by social etiquette and the secular world.³⁶¹ Consequently, he advocated for a return to humanity and the reclamation of childlike innocence. Li Zhi’s endorsement of childlike innocence was, in essence, a call for genuine *qing* – asserting that only creators with a childlike nature are capable of producing truly sincere works.³⁶²

Although the Chinese literary tradition remained largely focused on poetics, an increasing number of Ming era scholars gravitated towards popular “low” literature, drawn by

aesthetics of 'mind rules emotion and aspiration']," *Wen shi zhe* 文史哲 6 (2000): 52-53.

³⁶⁰ Li Zhi, *Li zhi wenji* 李贽文集 [Li Zhi's anthology] (Beijing Yanshan Publishing House, 1998), 126.

³⁶¹ Ibid.

³⁶² A Lian, "Li Zhi tongxin shuo yingxiang xia de wanming wentan 李贽'童心'说影响下的晚明文坛 [The literary world in the late Ming dynasty under the influence of Li Zhi's 'theory of childlike innocence']": 67.

its authenticity and genuineness.³⁶³ Novels, fictional short stories, folk songs, and drama scripts became popular forms of literature among the literati. The esteemed playwright Tang Xianzu's *Mudan Ting* 牡丹亭 (The Peony Pavilion) emerged as one of the most popular drama scripts of the middle and late Ming dynasty, celebrated for its humanistic approach that valued *qing* and affirmed human desire. In his preface, Tang Xianzu writes:

天下女子有情，宁有如杜丽娘者乎！梦其人即病，病即弥连，至手画形容，传于世而后死。死三年矣，复能溟漠中求得其所梦者而生。如丽娘者，乃可谓之有情人耳。情不知所起，一往而深。生者可以死，死可以生。...

Has the world ever seen a woman's love (*qing*) to rival that of Du Li-niang? Dreaming of a lover she fell sick; once sick she became ever worse; and finally, after painting her own portrait as a legacy to the world, she died. Dead for three years, still she was able to live again when in the dark underworld her quest for the object of her dream was fulfilled. To be as Du Li-niang is truly to have known love. Love is of source unknown, yet it grows ever deeper. The living may die of it, by its power the dead live again...³⁶⁴ [Cyril Birch translation]

In Tang Xianzu's narrative, *qing* (in this context, romantic love) seems to wield a mysterious power – profound love for a lover can cause the heroine Du Li-niang to fall ill, die, and even return from the dead. Here, the author's intent is to utilize the supernatural power of love to affirm and highlight the significance of “authentic *qing*”. His use of the phrase “love is of source unknown...” represents his interpretation of *qing*: the universal *qing*, representing affectionate love between genders, has no external cause;³⁶⁵ rather, the *qing* “of source unknown” is itself a cause.

³⁶³ Huang, "Sentiments of Desire: Thoughts on the Cult of Qing in Ming-Qing Literature," 165.

³⁶⁴ Tang Xianzu, *The Peony Pavilion: Mudan Ting*, ix.

³⁶⁵ Fu Xiaofan, "Zhuiqiu qing de Nubian yiyi: shilun wanming sichao luxiang de zhuanbian 追求情的普遍意义：试论晚明思潮路向的转变 [The general meaning of pursuing feelings: on changes of ideological trend in the late Ming dynasty]," *Lanzhou daxue xuebao* 兰州大学学报 29, no. 1 (2001): 59.

Some suggest that the heroine Du Li-niang is an artistic representation of the amalgamation of *qing* (love) and *yu* (desire).³⁶⁶ Her dream, illness, death, and rebirth symbolize her extreme yearning for love. In this context, Li-niang's love is a justified human desire, and "dying for love" illustrates the damage feudal ethics can inflict upon human nature.³⁶⁷ This plot arrangement by Tang Xianzu is a direct critique of Neo-Confucianism, which advocates the elimination of human desires (*mie renyu* 灭人欲). However, at the same time, Du Li-niang is constrained by *li* 理 (in this context, referring to "feudal ethics and rites"). While she has the power of *qing* to transcend all obstacles, Li-niang still seeks approval for her marriage from her parents and encourages her lover Liu Mengmei to attain fame and wealth, in order to gain societal support and recognition.³⁶⁸ This reflects Li-niang's frustration with reality, her pursuit confined within the limits imposed by the feudal order. Even as she affirms her personal quest and self-improvement, Li-niang also resorts to the social functions and norms constructed by feudal ethics and rites.

Another Ming era scholar who endorsed popular literature due to its presumed "genuine feelings" was Feng Menglong. His extreme devotion to *qing* – akin to a religion – is vividly expressed in the preface of his work *qingshi* 情史 (History of Love):

余少负情痴，遇朋侪必倾赤相与，吉凶同患。

...ever since I was a young man, I have prided myself on being a *qing*-crazy. Amongst my friends and equals I always pour out all my heart, sharing with them in times both good and bad...

.....

又尝欲择取古今情事之美者，各著小传，使人知情之可久，于是乎无情化有，私情化公.....

Again, my intent has been to choose the best from among the stories concerning *qing*,

³⁶⁶ Zou Zizhen, "Li zhi de tongxin shuo yu tang xian zu de qing zhi shuo 李贽的'童心说'与汤显祖的'情至说' [Li Zhi's 'theory of childlike innocence' and Tang Xianzu's 'theory of genuine feelings']," *Fuzhou daxue xuebao* 福州大学学报 1 (2009): 66.

³⁶⁷ Qu Huaying, "Mu dancing zhiqing guan 《牡丹亭》‘至情’观 [On the view of 'genuine feelings' in The Peony Pavilion]," *Shandong jiaoyu xueyuan xuebao* 山东教育学院学报 2 (2006): 60.

³⁶⁸ Ibid.

both ancient and contemporary, and to write up a brief account for each, so that I might make known to men the abiding nature of *qing*, and thereby turn the unfeeling into men of sensitivity, and transform private feeling into public concern...

.....

虽事专男女，未尽雅驯，而曲终之奏，要归于正。善读者可以广情，不善读者亦不至于导欲。

Though all the stories herein deal only with men and women — some of them not exactly the most elegant and refined of stories — their endings nevertheless and for the most part are on the right path. For those who know how to read it, the compilation can help deepen and broaden their feelings; nonetheless, it also will not lead those who do not know how to read it to the path of licentiousness.

.....

天地若无情，不生一切物。

Had heaven and earth had no *qing* they would not have produced the myriad of things.

.....

我欲立情教，教诲诸众生：子有情于父，臣有情于君.....

I intend to establish a school of *qing* to teach all who are living, so that a son will face his father with *qing* and a vassal will face his lord with *qing*...³⁶⁹ [Hua-yuan Li Mowry translation]

Hence, we are able to discern Feng Menglong's understanding of *qing*: First, Feng believed that *qing* was an inherent characteristic shared by all entities, including human beings, as expressed in the phrase, "Had heaven and earth had no *qing* they would not have produced the myriad of things".³⁷⁰ Second, based on this premise, Feng introduced the concept of a "religion of *qing*", stating, "I intend to establish a school of *qing* to teach all who are living..." Here, I opt to use the term "religion of *qing*", rather than Mowry's translation

³⁶⁹ Huang, "Sentiments of Desire: Thoughts on the Cult of Qing in Ming-Qing Literature," 161. *Qingshi* 情史 (History of Love), a collection of short love stories throughout Chinese dynasties, compiled by Feng Menglong. English version see: Menglong Feng, *Chinese Love Stories from "Ch'ing-shih"*, 12-15.

³⁷⁰ Fu Xiaofan, "Zhuiqiu qing de Nubian yiyi: shilun wanming sichao luxiang de zhuanbian 追求情的普遍意义：试论晚明思潮路向的转变 [The general meaning of pursuing feelings: on changes of ideological trend in the late Ming dynasty]," *Lanzhou daxue xuebao* 兰州大学学报 29, no. 1 (2001): 59.

“school of *qing*”, because I see this obsession with *qing* as resembling a kind of fervent worship of religion without any pejorative overtones. Taking *qing* as the fundamental basis of moral and ethical education, Feng sought to utilize *qing* as a means of achieving the goal of educating and civilizing humanity. Thirdly, he cautioned that *qing* could potentially devolve into *yu*. Feng emphasized that proper education in *qing* could enrich people’s emotions and, consequently, stabilize society, while the absence of such education could cause *qing* to degrade into the detrimental *yu* (lust, desire).

4.7 *Qing* in Ming Courtesans’ Music

Having explored the sophisticated connotations of *qing* in the Chinese context and its historical evolution, we now turn our attention to music-related areas. In this section, I focus on one specific dimension of *qing* – the embodiment of emotion in the Ming courtesans’ musical practices. Drawing on examples from Ming era written records, I particularly focus on emotion-related words in song-texts sung by courtesans, analysing the prevalent sentiments and states of mind. This kind of collection and interpretation of emotion-related words in the Ming dynasty Chinese context is rare, but not non-existent. In Ōki Yasushi and Paolo Santangelo’s 2011 book about love songs in Ming China, they conducted a comprehensive compilation of literal expressions related to emotions, states of mind, sensory feelings, the inner world, taboo words, and swear words in the book *Shan’ge* 山歌 (Mountain Songs).³⁷¹ Unlike Ōki and Santangelo’s work, my research aims to cover a broader scope (including novels, short stories, drama scripts, and anecdotes) and focuses specifically on the connection between emotion and music.³⁷²

For modern songs, the most accurate way to understand the emotions expressed in the music is to consult the composers directly. However, in the case of ancient music performed

³⁷¹ Yasushi Ōki and Paolo Santangelo, *Shan’ge, the ‘Mountain Songs’: Love Songs in Ming China* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2011). <https://brill.com/view/title/19163>.

³⁷² Patrik N. Juslin, *Musical emotions explained: Unlocking the secrets of musical affect* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2019), 49.

by Ming era courtesans, the original creators of the songs or tunes are no longer with us. While some tune names still exist in contemporary folk ditties, it is nearly impossible to determine the changes these tunes have undergone over more than four hundred years. Furthermore, the lyrics of these ditties have also undergone drastic changes. In the absence of specific and audible musical elements, text-based lyrics are the only reference available. The cases referred to in this chapter are mainly drawn from Ming dynasty novels and songbooks. For the examples taken from songbooks, I have analysed the emotion-related words and prominent images in the lyrics, summarizing the emotions contained therein. It is important to note that due to the lack of contextualisation, the identities of female characters in many *sanqu* and popular song lyrics are not necessarily courtesans. However, based on the popularity of these songs in Ming era entertainment venues and among Ming literati, I argue that they were probably also part of courtesans' repertoires. As for the performance fragments excerpted from novels, I have explored the emotions in the courtesans' songs by combining the texts of lyrics, the performance modes of courtesans, and the audience's reaction in the context.

4.7.1 Basic Emotions in Ming Courtesans' Music

The repertoire employed by Ming courtesans was not uniform in style as it had to cater to audiences of various classes and social statuses. From the highly popular opera *chuanqi* and the *sanqu*, which is akin to the poetic traditions of poems and *ci*, to the *shan'ge* (mountain songs) passed down orally among the people, the types of music mastered by courtesans in entertainment venues were diverse and tailored to the needs of the guests. A commonality among these different music genres is that their content is closely tied to emotion (*qing*). The widespread use and expression of *qing* in the music of courtesans drew the attention of literati due to its sincerity. This is evident in Feng Menglong's bold criticism of rigid Confucian principles and orthodox poetics in the preface to *Shan'ge* – “borrowing the genuine emotions of man and woman, uncovering the falseness of Confucianism 借男女之真情，发名教之伪药。”³⁷³ Sincere expression of sentiments was highly valued by the Ming literati.

³⁷³ Feng Menglong, *Gua zhi'er shan'ge taixia xin zou* 挂枝儿 山歌 太霞新奏 [Hanging branches, mountain

If *qing* in this context refers to emotions and states of mind, the following questions may arise: What are the common emotions in the musical expression of Ming era courtesans? What patterns emerge in the emotions expressed in courtesan music? I argue that, akin to popular music in many cultural contexts, the most common emotions in the music of Ming era courtesans are the five basic emotions: love, joy, sadness, anxiousness, and anger. Of course, Ming courtesans' music also encompasses complex and subtle emotions. For example, emotions such as "depression", "melancholy", "nostalgia", and "loneliness" are prevalent in songs, and while they all belong to the family of "sadness", each has its own subtle emotional connotations.

Emotion is central to why people engage with music, a commonality across various cultural contexts. Whether for entertainment, healing, self-expression, or aesthetic experience, music serves as a universal medium that brings people together.³⁷⁴ Many scholars believe that modern human emotions originated from adaptive responses that increased the chances of survival for individuals and genes throughout evolution.³⁷⁵ These adaptive responses (reading emotions) are effective for dealing with a range of life-tasks faced by living organisms, such as avoiding danger (fear), locating food and habitable territories (curiosity), engaging in play with others (enjoyment), competing for resources (anger), participating in courtship rituals (desire and love), avoiding toxins (disgust), and caring for offspring (tenderness).³⁷⁶ These responses can be seen as archetypes of basic human emotions.³⁷⁷

Music has the capacity to express a wide range of emotions. According to three separate studies conducted across various countries and professions, in which subjects were asked about the emotions music can express, the five basic emotions emerged as the most commonly expressed emotions in music: love, joy, sadness, anxiousness, and anger.³⁷⁸ Other

songs, new music of Taixia].

³⁷⁴ Juslin, *Musical emotions explained: Unlocking the secrets of musical affect*, 5.

³⁷⁵ Keith Oatley, *Best laid schemes: The psychology of the emotions* (Cambridge University Press, 1992), 138. Jaak Panksepp, *Affective neuroscience: The foundations of human and animal emotions* (Oxford university press, 2004), 26.

³⁷⁶ Juslin, *Musical emotions explained: Unlocking the secrets of musical affect*, 52.

³⁷⁷ Paul Ekman, "An argument for basic emotions," *Cognition & emotion* 6, no. 3-4 (1992): 170.

³⁷⁸ G. Kreutz, "Basic emotions in music" (Proceedings of the sixth international conference on music perception

sentiments such as solemnity, calm, tension, humour, and hate were also frequently mentioned.³⁷⁹ In relation to the Ming cases I have gathered and analysed, I identify the same five basic emotions as central: love, joy, sadness, anxiousness, and anger. In relation to the Ming cases I have gathered and analysed, the most common emotions expressed in courtesans' music closely correspond to the basic emotions listed above. In the following sections, I have extracted cases from the lyrics of folk songs and *sanqu* commonly performed by Ming courtesans, correlating them with the aforementioned five emotions, and analysing the particular combination of feelings and thoughts expressed in these songs individually.

4.7.2 The Love Process between Courtesans and Clients

I have observed that the themes of love and lust between men and women are frequently addressed in the music of Ming courtesans — mirroring the prevalence of love-related elements in contemporary pop songs. Ōki and Santangelo found that approximately 70 percent of emotion-related terms in *Shan'ge* pertained to various forms of passionate love, adulterous love, or desire.³⁸⁰ *Sanqu* and popular songs, as the most frequently played music genres by Ming era courtesans, effectively bridged the communicative gap in the realm of pleasure. While popular songs are characterized by their explicit, raunchy, and indelicate manifestation and performance style, *sanqu* — a more refined performance genre favoured by literati and art aficionados — also incorporates numerous themes related to romantic and passionate love. The Ming literati produced an extensive number of *sanqu* works, the majority of which focus on scenery, melancholic feelings, and love stories set in pleasure quarters and

and cognition, Keele University, UK., 2000). Erik Lindström, "The contribution of immanent and performed accents to emotional expression in short tone sequences," *Journal of New Music Research* 32, no. 3 (2003). Patrik N. Juslin and Petri Laukka, "Communication of emotions in vocal expression and music performance: Different channels, same code?," *Psychological bulletin* 129, no. 5 (2003). Patrik N. Juslin and Petri Laukka, "Expression, perception, and induction of musical emotions: A review and a questionnaire study of everyday listening," *Journal of new music research* 33, no. 3 (2004). Juslin, *Musical emotions explained: Unlocking the secrets of musical affect*, 84.

³⁷⁹ Juslin, *Musical emotions explained: Unlocking the secrets of musical affect*, 84.

³⁸⁰ Ōki and Santangelo, *Shan'ge, the 'Mountain Songs': Love Songs in Ming China*, 44.

boudoirs.³⁸¹ Some scholars have dismissed these florid and amorous *sanqu* as “mediocre works”.³⁸² Nonetheless, a minority of literati utilized *sanqu* as a platform to lament social conditions.³⁸³ For the purposes of this thesis, these verses, rich in exquisite and delicate sentiments, offer invaluable insights into the emotional lives of Ming courtesans.

A natural progression of love is embedded in these folk songs and stand-alone artistic songs, making them ideal for courtesan performances. Based on the lyrics and love-related experiences they encapsulate, I have organized the songs into the following sequence (see Table 4.2, below).

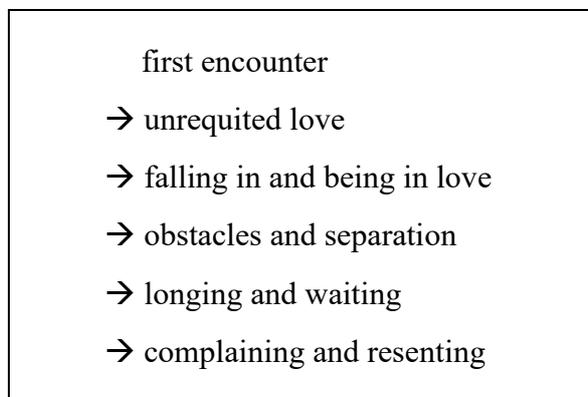


Table 4.2: A natural progression of love in the courtesans’ song texts.

It is noteworthy that the song collections do not specifically list the songs in this order, and the transition between these stages of love is not necessarily linear. Nonetheless, this sequence encapsulates the typical evolution of courtesan-client relationships — relationships that are inherently temporary and transactional in nature. Judith Zeitlin proposed a similar classification in her work on Ming era illustrated songbooks and courtesans, dividing a courtesan’s love process into nine stages: courtship through item exchange, dating, falling in

³⁸¹ Wang Qi, Hong Bozhao, and Xie Boyang, *Yuan Ming Qing sanqu xuan* 元明清散曲选 [A selection of *sanqu* from the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties], 8-9.

³⁸² Ibid.

³⁸³ Ibid.

love, breakup, reminiscence, reunion, longing, and mourning the death of a beloved.³⁸⁴ However, Zeitlin did not proceed beyond the classification stage. By contrast, my categorization of courtesans' love stages is more succinct (six stages as opposed to nine), and it further highlights the resentment and bitterness inherent in these relationships — dimensions that Zeitlin did not explore. Additionally, I discuss the prevalent sarcasm and humour in courtesan music, a theme also emphasized by James I. Crump in his book on *sanqu*.³⁸⁵ While this humour often derives from sarcasm directed at others, it nevertheless elicits positive emotions in listeners. I have drawn on corresponding cases from Ming songbooks to analyse the development and transformations of each stage and use these love-related cases as a lens through which to explore the diverse emotions embedded within them.

The above sequence encompasses a range of emotions, including love and lust, joy, melancholic feelings, sadness, anxiousness, and even anger. While there are numerous Ming *sanqu* that evoke melancholic emotions, they are often absent from *sanqu* anthologies, dismissed as overly sentimental and unworthy of inclusion. This category also encompasses a range of negative emotions associated with sadness, such as loneliness, boredom, nostalgia, and depression, which often co-occur in lyrical contexts. Unlike sadness, which typically relates directly to a specific event, melancholy is persistent and long-lasting, meriting its own distinct category.³⁸⁶ The emotion of melancholy permeates all phases of love, reaching its zenith in the “longing and waiting” phase.

4.7.2.1 *First encounter*

In lyrics regarding the first encounter, courtesans were typically depicted as young and shy, with the focus on positive emotions. This is exemplified in a *sanqu* written by the Ming dramatist Liang Chenyu:

³⁸⁴ Zeitlin, "The Pleasures of Print: Illustrated Songbooks from the Late Ming Courtesan World," 59.

³⁸⁵ James Irving Crump, *Song-poems from Xanadu* (University of Michigan Center for Chinese, 1993).

³⁸⁶ Ōki and Santangelo, *Shan'ge, the 'Mountain Songs': Love Songs in Ming China*, 324.

玉抱肚 春郊邂逅

为贪闲耍，向西郊常寻岁华。霎时间遇着个乔才，想今年命合桃花。邀郎同上七香车，遥指红楼是妾家。³⁸⁷

[To the tune] The Jade Waistband

An encounter in the spring outing

For fun, I going to the western suburbs in search of spring's abundance. Suddenly, I meet a handsome guy and realize this year's romantic fortune is about to blossom. Inviting my darling to a fragrant carriage,³⁸⁸ I point to the red house in the distance and say, "That is my home."

The title of this *sanqu* clarifies that the content is about the first encounter between a woman and her lover during a spring tour. The undertone is positive and joyful. This romantic encounter theme is usually unfolded from a man's perspective, but the protagonist in this song is a girl.³⁸⁹ Through brief psychological and action descriptions, the lyrics portray the girl's playfulness, curiosity, longing for love, and her warm attitude toward her lover.

4.7.2.2 *Unrequited love*

The second phase of love between courtesans and literati comprises one-sided love and longing for a beloved one. This stage often includes melancholic feelings. The first example is a popular song from *Gua Zhi'er* 挂枝儿 (Hanging Branches), titled "Listening to the singing" (听唱 *tingchang*), which vividly portrays a girl's heart being touched by a song:

³⁸⁷ Wang Qi, Hong Bozhao, and Xie Boyang, *Yuan Ming Qing sanqu xuan* 元明清散曲选 [A selection of *sanqu* from the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties], 334.

³⁸⁸ 七香车 *qi xiang che*, literally means "seven fragrances carriage". The "carriage" means a kind of horse-drawn vehicle. In ancient Chinese context, 七香车 refers to carriage using a variety of spices coating or carriage made of a variety of incense wooden.

³⁸⁹ Wang Qi, Hong Bozhao, and Xie Boyang, *Yuan Ming Qing sanqu xuan* 元明清散曲选 [A selection of *sanqu* from the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties], 335.

闷厌厌，独倚在妆台傍。忽听得有情人（唱的）《山坡羊》，一声声钻在奴心（儿）上。越听越烦恼，（待）不听又思量。事不关心也，关心的（自）暗暗（里）想。³⁹⁰

Bored and listless, leaning against the dressing table alone.

Suddenly, I hear someone with *qing* singing “Goats on the Hillside”,

Each note burrowing into my captive heart.

The more I listen, the more vexed I become,

And when I stop, I’m lost in thought.

Though it seems I don’t care, in my heart, I secretly do.

The second example presents pitiful love from a girl to her adoring lover:

桂枝香 风情

半天丰韵，前生缘分。蓦然间冷语三分，窄地里热心一寸。梦中蝶魂，梦中蝶魂，月中花晕，暗中思忖可怜人。不知兴庆池边树，何似风流倜傥身？³⁹¹

[To the tune] Fragrance of Osmanthus Twigs

Amorous feelings

Half a day full of charm, fated from our past lives.

Suddenly a few cold words, and suddenly an inch of warmth emerges.

A butterfly ghost in a dream, a butterfly ghost in a dream, and

The shadow of a flower under the moonlight, silently pondering the pitiful person.

I wonder if the trees beside Xingqing Pond³⁹² can compare to your dashing figure?

The author uses poetic language to express the tender and bitter love of a young girl who could not help but fall in love with a charming young man. The manner of the lyrics is

³⁹⁰ Feng Menglong, *Gua zhi'er shan'ge taixia xinzou* 挂枝儿 山歌 太霞新奏 [Hanging branches, mountain songs, new music of Taixia], 29.

³⁹¹ Wang Qi, Hong Bozhao, and Xie Boyang, *Yuan Ming Qing sanqu xuan* 元明清散曲选 [A selection of sanqu from the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties], 339. The author is Zhang Fengyi 张凤翼.

³⁹² A pond name in Xingqing Palace, Tang era Chang'an City.

exquisite: the contrast between “warm” and “cold” in the second sentence; the repeated line “a butterfly ghost in a dream” comes from the ancient Chinese philosophical fable “The Butterfly Dream” — is what one sees real or illusory?³⁹³

The third example, full of melancholic emotions, vividly depicts a girl trapped in love:

山坡羊

嫩绿芭蕉庭院，新绣鸳鸯罗扇。天时乍暖，乍暖浑身倦。整金莲，秋千画架前。几回欲上，欲上羞人见。走入纱橱枕泪眠。芳年，芳年正可怜；其间，其间不敢言。³⁹⁴

[To the tune] Goats on the Hillside

Tender green banana trees line the courtyard,
newly embroidered mandarin ducks adorn the silk fan.
The weather turns warm, the sudden warmth making me drowsy.
Tending to my golden lotus shoes, by the painted swing frame I stand.
Several times I've wanted to sit, yet am too shy to be seen.
Stepping into my gauze-canopied bed, tears wetting my pillow as I sleep.
Fragrant years, my fragrant years are indeed pitiable,
In these years, I do not dare to speak.

Through detailed descriptions, this *sanqu* presents a girl's sentimentality, likely caused by unrequited love. The warm weather, the spring-filled courtyard, and the embroidered mandarin duck on the fan are enough to stir her sensitive emotions. The three sentences in the middle, depicting her hesitation in front of the swing, are particularly sophisticated. This delicate and lengthy psychological struggle might seem somewhat affected, yet is surely commonplace, especially among underage girls.

³⁹³ Cai Jing. "Zhuangzhou meng die de zhexue yiyun 庄周梦蝶的哲学意蕴 [Philosophical implications of Zhuang Zhou dreaming of a butterfly]." *Chongqing ligong daxue xuebao shehui kexue* 重庆理工大学学报(社会科学) 27 (2013): 83-85.

³⁹⁴ Wang Qi, Hong Bozhao, and Xie Boyang, *Yuan Ming Qing sanqu xuan* 元明清散曲选 [A selection of *sanqu* from the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties], 246.

Another *sanqu*, entitled “Goats on the Hillside,” features a similar mood in *Mu Dan Ting* 牡丹亭 (The Peony Pavilion). When the heroine Du Li-niang returns to her boudoir after enjoying the garden spring scenery, she sings a song about her worries of love and the anguish of not being able to spend springtime with her lover:

没乱里春情难遣，蓦地里怀人幽怨。...甚良缘，把青春抛的远！...迁延，这衷
怀那处言！淹煎，泼残生，除问天！

From turbulent heart these springtime thoughts of love will not be banished...

But for what grand alliance is this springtime of my youth so cast away?...

Lingering, where to reveal my true desires!

Suffering, this wasting, where but to Heaven shall my lament be made!³⁹⁵

[Cyril Birch translation]

4.7.2.3 *Falling in and being in love*

The third phase is when a courtesan falls in love with her lover. The “Volume of intimacy” (私部 *sibu*) and “Volume of Pleasure” (欢部 *huanbu*) in Feng Menglong’s *Gua Zhi’er* 挂枝儿 (Hanging Branch) contains many songs exploring such themes. One example is “Good time 佳期”, which depicts the sweetness of lovers spending a night together:

灯儿下，细把娇姿来觑，脸儿红，嘿不语，隻把头低，怎当得会温存风流佳
婿。金扣含羞解，银灯带笑吹。我（与你）受（尽了）无限（的）风波也，今
夜谐鱼水。³⁹⁶

Under the lamp, I observe your delicate grace,

Your cheeks blush, silent and shy, with your head lowered,

³⁹⁵ Tang Xianzu, *The Peony Pavilion: Mudan Ting*, 46-47.

³⁹⁶ Feng Menglong, *Gua zhi'er shan'ge taixia xinzou* 挂枝儿 山歌 太霞新奏 [Hanging branches, mountain songs, new music of Taixia], 4.

How could you handle the gentle and romantic embrace of your beautiful spouse.
The golden button is shyly undone,
The silver lantern is blown out with a smile,
I (and you) have endured countless storms,
Yet tonight, we harmonize like fish and water.

The second example provides a different perspective on the love between courtesans and their lovers. Their love is so profound that even when she is with other guests, her thoughts remain with her lover:

专心
满天星当不得月儿亮，
一群鸦怎比得孤凤凰？
眼前人怎比得我冤家模样？
难说普天下是他头一个美，
只我相交中他委实强！
我身子儿陪着他人也，
心儿中自把他想。³⁹⁷

Wholeheartedly

Countless stars cannot outshine the moon's brightness,
How can a flock of crows compare to a lone phoenix?
And how can the one before me compare to my darling?
It is hard to say he is the most handsome in the whole world,
But to me, he is truly incomparable!
My body may accompany others,
But in my heart, it is him I think of.

³⁹⁷ Feng Menglong, *Gua zhi'er shan'ge taixia xinzou* 挂枝儿 山歌 太霞新奏 [Hanging branches, mountain songs, new music of Taixia], 16.

This phase of love is not without its complexities, nor is it all sweetness, as intimate relationships often give rise to a range of negative emotions including jealousy, anger, and hate.³⁹⁸ An example of jealousy is evident in the mountain song “Catching paramour 捉头”. When the patron see the courtesan meeting privately with another lover, he cannot help but “tear a lantern with fire in their eyes 撕破了个灯笼个个眼里火”³⁹⁹ — a metaphor for the rage that jealousy ignites.

The emotion of jealousy is further explored in the popular song “Asking the Bite Mark” (问咬 *wenyao*), where the female protagonist half-jokingly, half-jealously inquiries about the tooth marks on her lover’s shoulders, suspecting infidelity:

肩膀上现咬著牙齿印，你实说那个咬，我也不嗔，省得我逐日间将你（来）盘问。咬的是你肉，疼的是我心。是那一家冤家也，（咬得你）这般样的狠？⁴⁰⁰

On your shoulder, there are now teeth marks. I won't be angry if you tell me who did it, saving me from questioning you every day. The bite is on your flesh, but the pain is in my heart. Which household is she from, (biting you) so ruthlessly?

The following example reveals the complex, sometimes dark dynamics of a courtesan-patron relationship. The song title, “Love” (爱 *ai*), belies the intricate power play between the two parties:

（你）嗔我时，瞧著你，（隻当做）笑嘻嘻。（你）打我时，受著你，（隻当做）把情调。（你）骂我时，听著你，（隻当把）心肝来叫。（爱你）骂我（的）声音（儿）好，（爱你）打我（的）手势（儿）娇。（还爱你）宜喜宜嗔也，嗔我时越觉（得）好。⁴⁰¹

³⁹⁸ Julie Fitness and Garth Fletcher, "Emotion labelling in close relationships," *New Zealand Journal of Psychology* 19, no. 2 (1990). Phillip Shaver et al., "Emotion knowledge: further exploration of a prototype approach," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 52, no. 6 (1987).

³⁹⁹ Feng Menglong, *Gua zhi'er shan'ge taixia xinzou* 挂枝儿 山歌 太霞新奏 [Hanging branches, mountain songs, new music of Taixia], 154.

⁴⁰⁰ Feng Menglong, *Gua zhi'er shan'ge taixia xinzou* 挂枝儿 山歌 太霞新奏 [Hanging branches, mountain songs, new music of Taixia], 18.

⁴⁰¹ Feng Menglong, *Gua zhi'er shan'ge taixia xinzou* 挂枝儿 山歌 太霞新奏 [Hanging branches, mountain songs, new music of Taixia], 25.

When you're angry with me, I just look at you and laugh. When you hit me, I just take it as if you're setting the mood. When you scold me, I just listen as if you're calling to my heart. I love the sound of you scolding me, I love the way your hand moves when you hit me. I even love you being so easily happy and easily angered, the angrier you are, the better.

The nature of the relationship depicted in the lyrics is ambiguous, and there are several ways to interpret it. One interpretation is that the lovers in the lyrics are expressing their affection in a flirtatious manner. In this scenario, playful beatings and scolding are viewed as means of expressing love. Alternatively, another interpretation may reveal the rough and realistic aspects of the courtesan-client relationship: the lyrics portray the dynamics of domination and submission. Given that popular songs in brothels are typically performed by courtesans, it is reasonable to surmise that they are the “I” in the lyrics. Consequently, courtesans may adopt a passive role in this relationship, occasionally needing to cater to the guests and their desires. Although the “anger” appears in the texts, the basic emotion conveyed by this song is love, signifying affectionate sentiment between the lovers.

The next example is also a popular song in *Gua Zhi'er*. The lyrics unfold in the form of a dialogue between the two parties, showing the scene of a male guest comforting his jealous lover:

惯了你，惯了你偏生淘气；惯了你，惯了你倒把奴欺；...几番要打你，怎禁你笑脸陪，笑脸儿相迎，乖，莫说打你，（就）骂也骂不起。并不曾，并不曾与你淘气；并不曾，并不曾把你来欺；并不曾，并不曾（到）别人家去睡。（你的）身子儿最要紧，（那）闲气少寻些。（我若是）果有甚亏心，乖，莫说骂我，（就）打也（是）应该的。⁴⁰²

⁴⁰² Feng Menglong, *Gua zhi'er shan'ge taixia xinzou* 挂枝儿 山歌 太霞新奏 [Hanging branches, mountain songs, new music of Taixia], 24. The song name is “Accompanied by Smiles 陪笑”.

[Woman:]⁴⁰³ Spoil you, I spoil you but you are so naughty. Spoil you, I spoil you but you deceive me... Several times I wanted to hit you, but how can I resist your smiling face, greeting me with a smiling face. My darling, I can't even scold you, never mind hitting you.

[Man:] Never, never have I been mischievous with you. Never, never have I deceived you. Never, never have I slept at someone else's house. Your well-being is the most important, and don't be trapped by that idle anger. If I have a bad heart, my darling, don't just scold me, you should beat me as it should be.

Love, jealousy, and anger all permeate the lyrics. In the first half, the woman experiences anger due to her suspicion that the man has other lovers. However, her love for him prevents her from resorting to physical violence or harsh words. The second half provides justification and consolation from the man's perspective. The phrase "I slept at someone else's house" can be reasonably interpreted as the man being a guest who frequents brothels, with "someone else's house" alluding to other brothels. This interpretation sheds light on why the woman is initially unwilling to resort to violence or verbal abuse: what grounds does a courtesan have to be upset with a client who provides financial compensation?

4.7.2.4 *Obstacles and separation*

In Feng Menglong's song collection *Gua Zhi'er*, there is a volume titled "Farewell" (别部 *biebu*), which predominantly features popular songs themed around the separation of lovers. A prevailing mood of melancholy characterizes this section, with recurring metaphors of boats, flowing water, and willow trees symbolizing the concept of parting. Here are two examples:

⁴⁰³ The "man" and "woman" in the "[]" brackets are added by the current author. The original texts did not explicitly state whether there are two singers or just one.

送别

送情人，直送到河沿上，使我泪珠儿湿透了罗裳，他那里频回首添惆怅。水儿流得紧，风儿吹得狂。那狠心的梢公也，（又）加上一把桨。

Farewell

Bidding farewell to my lover, right by the riverbank,
My tears have completely drenched through my silk gown.
His frequent glances back only add to my sorrow.
The water flows swiftly, the wind blows fiercely,
And that heartless boatman, with an added stroke of his oar.

.....

初别

玉人儿，辞别了（径往）他州去，撇下奴（独自）船舱内，好不孤凄。知几时和你重相会，明月穿窗影，清风过柳溪。好一个良宵也，可怜隻少（了）你。⁴⁰⁴

Initial farewell

My jade person, parting to another province,
Leaving me alone in the boat cabin, such desolation.⁴⁰⁵
When will we reunite?
The moonlight casts shadows through the window,
A gentle breeze flows over the willow stream.
Such a fine night,
Yet pitifully lacking your presence.

Another quintessential depiction of separation is found in a *sanqu* composed by Chen Yujiao, a Ming era dramatist:

⁴⁰⁴ Feng Menglong, *Gua zhi'er shan'ge taixia xinzou* 挂枝儿 山歌 太霞新奏 [Hanging branches, mountain songs, new music of Taixia], 44+48.

⁴⁰⁵ According to Feng Menglong's "Mountain Songs", and Ōki and Santangelo's study, the woman lives in a boat cabin is very likely to be a low-class prostitute. Ōki and Santangelo, *Shan'ge, the 'Mountain Songs': Love Songs in Ming China*, 130.

折桂令 碣山晚别

两船几分载离愁，云懒西飞，水恨东流。昨夜兰房，今宵桂楫，甚日琼楼？撒不下虹霓舞袖，带将回烟雨眉头。柳岸沙洲，有限留连，无限绸缪。⁴⁰⁶

[To the tune] Command to Pluck the Osmanthus

The farewell at sunset in Xianshan

Two boats bear the sorrow of parting,
Clouds lazily drift westward, while the water resentfully flows east.
Last night (we were in) the orchid boudoir, tonight (we were in) the osmanthus boat,
When will we be in the jade tower?
Unable to throw away my rainbow sleeves of dance,
Tears in the misty rain further furrow my brows.
The willow shore and sandy islet,
There is a limit to lingering, but an endless thread of love.

This song offers a female perspective, encompassing the melancholic sentiments experienced by a woman as she bids farewell to her lover. The dancing sleeves suggest that the woman is a courtesan, leading to the inference that the orchid boudoir can refer to a brothel room. It is conceivable that the two lovers shared a memorable time together, yet the nature of relationships in a brothel tends to be fleeting and ephemeral, with genuine romantic involvement being an exception rather than the norm. Consequently, following a night of intimacy, the inevitable outcome for the couple was separation.

4.7.2.5 *Longing and waiting*

At the stage of yearning and reminiscence, typically courtesans and literati find themselves in a state of separation. The courtesan's longing and hopeless waiting infuse the mood with melancholy, with loneliness often being a prevalent theme. Common adjectives

⁴⁰⁶ Wang Qi, Hong Bozhao, and Xie Boyang, *Yuan Ming Qing sanqu xuan* 元明清散曲选 [A selection of sanqu from the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties], 357.

during this phase include *lan* 懒 (idle), *chou* 愁 (worried, anxious, or sentimental), and *guling* 孤零 or *lingding* 伶仃 (lonely).

The first example explores themes of boredom, melancholy, and depression, as demonstrated in a *sanqu* written by Ming literatus Shen Shi:

懒画眉 春日闺中即事

东风吹粉酿梨花，几日相思闷转加。偶闻人语隔窗纱，不觉猛地浑身乍。却原来是架上鹦哥不是他！⁴⁰⁷

[To the tune] Too Lazy to Paint Brows

On a spring day in the boudoir

The east wind pinks the pear blossoms to bloom,

Several days of yearning only deepen my melancholy.

Suddenly, I hear voices through the window screen,

And unexpectedly, my whole body jolts.

Alas, it turns out to be the parrot on the shelf, not him!

This song encapsulates the emotion of waiting, underpinned by a pervasive sense of melancholy. The depiction of a young lady's lovesick appearance is astute: her excitement upon hearing the parrot's voice, mistakenly believing it heralds her lover's return, is poignantly portrayed. The lyric's reference to pear flowers confirms the setting as springtime, with the vibrant blossoms symbolically mirroring the woman's lovesick turmoil. This juxtaposition of scenes of waiting against the backdrop of spring is a recurring motif in Ming *sanqu* texts. For example, in the opening verse of a Tang Shunmin's *sanqu*, the text reads, "A breeze of apricot flowers gently permeates the window gauze, her eyes fixed in eager anticipation of him. Unbeknownst to her, the moon ascends, bells toll, and drums resound. 杏花风习习暖透窗纱，眼巴巴颺望他，不觉的月儿明钟儿敲鼓儿挝。"⁴⁰⁸ This verse

⁴⁰⁷ Wang Qi, Hong Bozhao, and Xie Boyang, *Yuan Ming Qing sanqu xuan* 元明清散曲选 [A selection of *sanqu* from the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties], 283.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid*, 228.

explicitly situates the narrative in spring, vividly capturing the female protagonist's state of anticipation and longing.

The second example similarly portrays a woman waiting for her lover in spring:

黄莺儿

细雨湿蔷薇，画梁间燕子归，春愁似海深无底。天涯马蹄，灯前翠眉，马前芳草灯前泪。魂梦迷，云山满目，不辨路东西。⁴⁰⁹

[To the tune] The yellow warbler

Fine drizzle dampens the roses,
Swallows return to the painted beams,
Spring sorrows are as deep as the ocean and seemingly bottomless.
At the edge of the world, horse hooves tread,
In front of the lamp, emerald eyebrows furrow,
Fragrant grass before the horse and tears before the lamp.
Soul lost in a dream,
Cloudy mountains fill the eyes,
Unable to discern the direction of the roads east and west.

Tang Yin's artworks are known for their beauty and elegance, and this *sanqu* aligns with his signature style, offering vivid imagery and emotional depth. The lyrics paint a clear picture of a woman yearning for her lover on a spring day. The initial description is reminiscent of a painting, with "spring sorrows" paving the way for the subsequent theme of longing. In this imagined scenario, the heroine visualizes her distant lover riding horseback. The scene transitions to the woman drawing her eyebrows by lamp light, juxtaposing a real scene against an imagined one. The fragrant grass metaphorically represents a man's longing for a woman, a literary device with roots in a poem by Tang dynasty poet Niu Xiji: "记得绿罗裙，处处怜芳草。 I remember the green silk skirt, tenderly loving the fragrant grass

⁴⁰⁹ Wang Qi, Hong Bozhao, and Xie Boyang, *Yuan Ming Qing sanqu xuan* 元明清散曲选 [A selection of *sanqu* from the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties], 245. This *sanqu* was written by Ming era famous literati Tang Yin.

wherever it grows.”⁴¹⁰ Hence, the fragrant grass before the man’s horse corresponds to the woman’s tears beneath the lamp, symbolizing her longing for her distant lover. The concluding sentence describes the woman entering a dreamlike state due to her overwhelming sadness, with “cloudy mountains” possibly representing tears that cloud her vision and direction.

The following *sanqu* example, authored by the Ming dramatist Feng Weimin, encapsulates the emotion of loneliness experienced by women during this phase:

月儿高 闺情

月缺重门静，更残午夜永。手托芙蓉面，背立梧桐影。瘦损伶仃，越端相越孤另。抽身转入，转入房枕冷。又一个画影图形，半明不灭灯。灯，花烛杳无凭！一似灵鹊儿虚器，喜蛛儿不志诚。⁴¹¹

[To the tune] The Lofty Moon

Sentimentality in the boudoir

The waning moon hangs high, casting a calm over the heavy gate;

When the moonlight fades, midnight seems to last forever.

With her hand supporting her lotus-like face,

She stands against the shadow of the phoenix tree.

Her slender figure seems even more lonely and isolated,

Increasingly separate from the world.

She retreats and enters, enters the cold room.

Another painted shadow and silhouette emerge,

With the lamp casting a dim, unfading light.

The lamp’s flower-shaped candlewick gives no assurance!⁴¹²

Just as the spirit of the magpie is but an empty clamour,

And the happiness of the spider lacks sincerity.⁴¹³

⁴¹⁰ Gao Min, *Zhongguo gudai shige gailun yu mingzuo xinshang* 中国古代诗歌概论与名篇欣赏 [An introduction to ancient Chinese poetry and appreciation of famous pieces], 170.

⁴¹¹ Wang Qi, Hong Bozhao, and Xie Boyang, *Yuan Ming Qing sanqu xuan* 元明清散曲选 [A selection of sanqu from the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties], 325.

⁴¹² In ancient China, it was believed that the embers of the candlewick form into a flower-shape is an auspicious harbinger.

⁴¹³ Magpies and spiders are both considered auspicious signs in ancient Chinese context.

Employing a range of imagery, this *sanqu* describes a woman's deep yearning for her lover. The waning moon, lengthy night, plane tree shadow, her slender figure, cold window, and dim candlelight are all metaphors for loneliness. The final two verses depict the woman's frustration with the failure of auspicious signs — the flower-shaped candlewick, calling magpies, and spiders — to bring about her lover's return, as these symbols traditionally denote happy events in ancient China.

4.7.2.6 *Complaining and resenting*

In many cases, what the courtesans get in return for their passive waiting – as disappointing as it is – is most likely the loss of contact and absence of their lovers. As the song texts' narrative unfolds, the negative and melancholic emotions of the courtesan-heroine continue to accumulate, eventually reaching a crescendo that can manifest as sadness, anger, or resentment.

Anger-fuelled rebukes are a recurring theme in lyrics associated with courtesans. To illustrate, I present a *sanqu*, in which the emotion of anger is explicitly conveyed by a woman to her deceitful lover:

懒画眉 春怨

倚阑无语掐残花，蓦然间春色微烘上脸霞。相思薄倖那冤家，临风不敢高声骂，只教我指定名儿暗咬牙。⁴¹⁴

[To the tune] Too Lazy to Paint Brows

Spring resentment

Leaning on the railing in silence, picking off withered flowers,
All of a sudden, the hues of spring lightly brush upon my flushed cheeks.
Thinking of that heartless sweetheart, my unfortunate adversary,
Facing the wind, I dare not curse out loud,
But only silently grit my teeth and call out his name in my heart.

⁴¹⁴ Wang Qi, Hong Bozhao, and Xie Boyang, *Yuan Ming Qing sanqu xuan* 元明清散曲选 [A selection of *sanqu* from the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties], 283.

The lyrics adeptly encapsulate the inner turmoil of the woman's resentment resulting from her prolonged wait, portrayed through external actions such as plucking flowers, blushing, gritting her teeth, and cursing.

It is noteworthy that scolding can also serve as a playful flirtation between lovers. The subsequent example depicts a courtesan in a state of ambivalence, marked by a blend of anxiousness and anger. As she waits apprehensively, her anger gives rise to fantasies of admonishing and “punishing” her tardy lover:

他若是来时节，那一会坐衙，玉纤手忙将这俏冤家耳朵儿掐。

嗒，实实的那里行踏？

秀才，你须索吐一句儿真诚话！⁴¹⁵

If he comes in time, he will be sitting in the court;

With my jade-like slender hands,

I will be busily pinching the ears of this charming foe.

Hey, honestly tell me where did you go?

My enemy, you must spit out one sincere word!

Mixed emotions can emerge when the courtesan's waiting has the potential to be reciprocated with positive feedback. Actions such as pinching the lover's ears or interrogating him may outwardly appear to express anger but can be interpreted as a playful reprimand by a woman toward her tardy lover.

Numerous analogous instances of courtesans reprimanding their lovers can be found in Feng Menglong's *Gua Zhi'er*, particularly in the volume title “Gap 隙部”. One example is the lyric from “Enraged 发狠”, which goes, “Why do you love someone new and forget the old? ...It's better to be heartless, pooh! Letting go of each other's hands. 你为何恋新人忘了奴旧? ... (不如) 狠一狠的心肠也，啐！各自去丢开 (了) 手。”⁴¹⁶ Another example from the same volume is “Scolding 骂”:

⁴¹⁵ Wang Qi, Hong Bozhao, and Xie Boyang, *Yuan Ming Qing sanqu xuan* 元明清散曲选 [A selection of sanqu from the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties], 228.

⁴¹⁶ Feng Menglong, *Gua zhi'er shan'ge taixia xinzou* 挂枝儿 山歌 太霞新奏 [Hanging branches, mountain songs, new music of Taixia], 51.

劣冤家，今日里（与你）说个的当。扭住在牙床上，狠骂一场。薄幸人，负心贼，（一味）将人欺诳！（曾说下）山盟和海誓，（许我）地久共天长。想起万语千言也，（你说）那一句依前讲？⁴¹⁷

You wretched foe, today let's settle the score.
Tightly biting my teeth, I scold to the full.
You heartless rogue, ungrateful deceiver,
Always tricking and deceiving!
You once vowed a mountain alliance and sea oath,
Promising our love would last as long as the earth and heaven.
But thinking back on all the words and promises,
which one of those do you still hold true today?

The examples above explicitly illustrate how courtesans chastise their lovers in song lyrics. In the next two cases, although the word “scold” is not used, the courtesans’ anger at their lovers’ cheating (or being jealous) is evident:

闲言来嗑，野话儿劓，偷嘴的猫儿分外馋。只管里吓鬼瞒神，吃的明吃不的暗。搭上了他，瞒定了俺。七个头，八个胆。

Idle words crack, wild tales are trimmed,
The sneaky cat is exceptionally greedy.
Trying to scare ghosts and deceive gods, what is eaten openly cannot be eaten in secret.⁴¹⁸
Once matched with him, he is sure to deceive me.
With seven heads, he has eight gallbladders.⁴¹⁹
.....

⁴¹⁷ Feng Menglong, *Gua zhi'er shan'ge taixia xinze* 挂枝儿 山歌 太霞新奏 [Hanging branches, mountain songs, new music of Taixia], 60.

⁴¹⁸ This sentence refers to “cheating in secret”.

⁴¹⁹ Meaning extremely bold and courageous.

心肠儿窄，性气儿粗，听的风来就是雨。尚兀自拨火挑灯，一密里添盐加醋。
前怕狼，后怕虎。筛破的锣，擂破的鼓。⁴²⁰

Narrow-minded and ill-tempered, hearing the wind he thinks it's raining.⁴²¹

Still, he stirs the fire in the lamp, in secret adding salt and vinegar.

Fearful of the wolf in front and the tiger behind,

If you strike the gongs and drums too hard, they will break.

Given the title of the collection *Fengya Ji Chang Yan* 风雅集常言 (Sayings of the Elegant Affection),⁴²² which contains these two pieces, it is reasonable to surmise that the two female protagonists are likely courtesans, as they often took on the role of interpreting songs related to love affairs. The first rebukes a man for maintaining a relationship with the heroine while secretly engaging with others, using the phrase “seven heads and eight gallbladders” as a metaphor for the man’s audacity, a reference originating from the fourteenth chapter of *Jin Ping Mei*: “ ‘Who would have the seven heads and eight galls to assault me?’ scoffed Hsi-men Ch’ing.”⁴²³ The second example castigates the man for his narrow-mindedness and lack of generosity, becoming suspicious and blowing out of proportion any rumours he hears about the courtesan. The language used is characteristic of the popular songs of that time, earthy and vigorous.

The prolonged yearning and the despair of waiting often translate into sadness in the lyrics, which then morphs into resentment towards the lover. Emotions of hatred or resentment are commonly observed in lyrics from this phase. The following example encapsulates the resentment felt by a woman as she waits for her lover in her boudoir:

⁴²⁰ Wang Qi, Hong Bozhao, and Xie Boyang, *Yuan Ming Qing sanqu xuan* 元明清散曲选 [A selection of sanqu from the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties], 304-05.

⁴²¹ Meaning one takes rumours as truth.

⁴²² Wang Qi, Hong Bozhao, and Xie Boyang, *Yuan Ming Qing sanqu xuan* 元明清散曲选 [A selection of sanqu from the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties], 305.

⁴²³ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume One: The Gathering*, 275.

山坡羊

信迢迢无些凭准，睡惺惺何曾安稳？东风吹散，吹散梨花影。软怯身轻，身轻草上尘。只愁镜里，镜里朱颜损。栲栳量金难买春。伤神，伤神额黛颦；堪嗔，堪嗔薄倖人。⁴²⁴

[To the tune] Goats on the Hillside

I only worry about what is in the mirror, the beautiful face in the mirror is damaged.
It's hard to buy back spring even with a wicker basket full of gold. Exhausting, too
exhausting my eyebrows furrow; I can hate, can hate that heartless man.
The letter is distant, providing little certainty;
In restless sleep, how can one find tranquillity?
The east wind scatters, scatters the shadows of pear blossoms.
With a soft and timid demeanour, light as dust on the grass,
I worry for the reflection in the mirror,
Where my rosy cheeks have faded.
It's hard to buy back spring even with a wicker basket full of gold.⁴²⁵
It wears on the mind, furrows the brows,
And brings resentment towards the faithless one.

The lyrics seemingly depict a young woman lamenting the spring scenery, yet they actually express the sorrow and resentment of a woman yearning for her distant lover during springtime. Although the identity of the heroine is not explicitly revealed in the song, a clue suggests she is a courtesan: “buying spring” is a double entendre that historically alludes to purchasing wine and soliciting prostitutes in ancient China.⁴²⁶ By casting the courtesan as the protagonist, the song invites contemplation on the courtesan’s professional trajectory and her post-brothel destiny. It appears she is awaiting the return of a patron-lover, uncertain whether

⁴²⁴ Wang Qi, Hong Bozhao, and Xie Boyang, *Yuan Ming Qing sanqu xuan* 元明清散曲选 [A selection of sanqu from the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties], 247. The lyrics were written by Ming literatus Tang Yin.

⁴²⁵ The literary quotation in this lyric is from a poem written by Tang dynasty poet Lu Yanrang 卢延让, “A wicker basket full of gold can buy off spring 栲栳量金买断春”. Here, the meaning is reversed.

⁴²⁶ Feng Ge, “*Mai chun yuanben shi mai jiu* ‘买春’原本是买酒 [‘Buying spring’ originally means buying wine],” *Wenshi tiandi* 文史天地 4 (2011): 93.

he will fulfil his promises, such as potentially liberating her from the Household of Music and marrying her. She thus reflects on her fate: what will become of her if no one takes her hand in marriage?

The subsequent case, *Bu Bu Jiao* 步步娇 (Every Footstep Coquettish), is a *sanqu* derived from *Wu Ji Bai Mei* 吴姬百媚 (Seductive Courtesans in the Suzhou Area), a ranking list of courtesans from the Ming era (see Chapter 2 and Appendix). This compilation encompasses a plethora of works by literati, including poems, song lyrics, and commentaries, all of which are based on those courtesans:⁴²⁷

行行珠泪青衫湿，恨杀风儿急吹来。行院西游子，多情纷纷相识。相识久相抛，只落得，暗中自省愁如织。

Row by row, pearl tears wet my blue robe, cursing the gusts for blowing too fast.

Walking in the courtyard, a wandering man from the West,

So many passionate acquaintances made.

Acquaintances turned to separation over time,

Leaving only self-reflection in the dark, sorrow woven thick.

The *pipa* lute frequently appears in song texts about courtesans expressing resentment towards their lovers, highlighting the strong association between the *pipa* and yearning for someone. The depiction of a lonely woman playing the solo *pipa* is a recurring symbolic representation of lovesickness in Chinese literature, as the *pipa* can produce mournful, sobbing-like sounds, which resonate with the image of a woman living alone in her boudoir – as discussed previously, in Chapter 3.⁴²⁸ In 2012, Zhang Yali analysed the prevalence of specific sentiments associated with the *pipa* in Tang and Song poetry. Out of the 210 poems related to the *pipa*, approximately 70 poems utilize the instrument as a metaphor to express

⁴²⁷ Wanyuzi, *Wu ji bai mei* 吴姬百媚 [Seductive courtesans in Suzhou area] (Beijing: Beijing tu shu guan chu ban she, 2002).

⁴²⁸ Zhang Yali, "Tang Song ci yu pipa guanxi yanjiu 唐宋词与琵琶关系研究 [The relationship between Tang and Song ci and pipa]" (Master's thesis. Hebei University, 2012), 26.

feelings of longing, accounting for approximately one-third of the sampled texts.⁴²⁹

Moreover, the commonly appeared motif of *pipa* in the Ming song texts further solidifies the identities of the song heroines as courtesans, given its widespread use by Ming female entertainers. An illustrative case is a *sanqu* written by Ming dramatist Feng Weimin:

蟾宫曲

...雨丝丝，风翦翦，聚一堆落花，散一堆落花。闷无聊，愁无奈，唱一曲琵琶，拨一曲琵琶。业身躯无处安插，叫一句冤家，骂一句冤家。⁴³⁰

[To the tune] Moon Palace Tune

... Rain drizzles, wind gently blows,

A pile of fallen flowers gathers, a pile of fallen flowers scatters.

Bored and listless, filled with helpless sorrow,

Singing a tune with my *pipa*, plucking a melody on my *pipa*.

With nowhere to rest this weary body,

I call out to my heartbreaker, and curse that heartbreaker.

This *sanqu* delineates the courtesan's process of waiting for her lover, marked by uncertainty regarding his return, encompassing emotions of longing, boredom, and eventual disappointment and resentment. The song texts lament the relentless passage of time, possibly alluding to the courtesan's confinement within the brothel year after year, leaving her future uncertain. Ultimately, she directs her resentment towards her unreturned client-lover, reproaching him for his betrayal and failure to uphold his promises.

Another example with a similar context, but more pronounced resentment and less boredom, is a *sanqu* written by Ming-era literati Shi Pan 史槃 (1531-1630):⁴³¹

⁴²⁹ Zhang Yali, "Tang Song ci yu pipa guanxi yanjiu 唐宋词与琵琶关系研究 [The relationship between Tang and Song ci and pipa]," 26.

⁴³⁰ Wang Qi, Hong Bozhao, and Xie Boyang, *Yuan Ming Qing sanqu xuan* 元明清散曲选 [A selection of sanqu from the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties], 326.

⁴³¹ Wang Qi, Hong Bozhao, and Xie Boyang, *Yuan Ming Qing sanqu xuan* 元明清散曲选 [A selection of sanqu from the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties], 353.

醉罗歌

难道难道丢开罢？提起提起泪如麻。欲诉相思抱琵琶，手软弹不下。一腔恩爱，秋潮卷沙；百年夫妇，春风落花。耳边厢枉说尽了从良话。他人难靠，我见已差，虎狼也狠不过这冤家！

[To the tune] Song of the Drunk in Gauze

Let go, how can I just let go and move on?
Mentioning it, my tears flow like hemp thread when I mention it.
Wanting to express my longing, embracing the *pipa*,
But my hands are too soft, unable to play.
A wholehearted love, like autumn tides sweeping away the sands;
A couple lasting a century, like spring wind scattering flowers.
Whispers of reforming and settling have been spoken in vain in my ears.
Others are unreliable, and I was wrong about this heartbreaker,
Who is even more ruthless than tigers and wolves!

In this *sanqu*, the courtesan expresses her desire to settle down and marry, narrating her unfortunate love story marked by abandonment despite her lover's pledges. The heroine's courtesan identity is revealed through the use of the term *congliang* 从良, which translates to "reform and settling" in the penultimate sentence.⁴³² The heroine's act of holding the *pipa* and her intention to play it in the third sentence further confirm her occupation as a courtesan. As the lyrics progress, the emotional tone shifts from sadness to resentment.

4.7.3 Topics and Emotions beyond the Love Process

Of course, the songs interpreted by Ming era courtesans were not limited to love affairs. In this section, I have explored some examples that do not directly relate to the courtesan-client romantic dynamic, though they may well have done so indirectly. These examples,

⁴³² In ancient Chinese context, this term specifically refers to a prostitute or a courtesan who abandons the Household of Music, no longer living as an outcast, and marries a man from a good family.

while diverse in content, still primarily convey basic emotions. Joy, for instance, can be derived not only from romantic love but also from appreciating nature, engaging in music-making, and various other leisure pursuits. The following *sanqu* by the Ming literatus Chen Duo provides ideal examples of this:

醉花阴

深浅荷花二三里，仿佛似王维画里。凉雨过，晚风微，小舫轻移，来往垂杨底。好风景，喜追陪，万斛尘襟皆荡洗。

[To the tune] Drunk in the Shade of Flowers

Two or three miles of shallow and deep lotus flowers,
As if in a painting by Wang Wei.
After the cool rain, with a gentle evening breeze,
The small boat moves lightly, coming and going beneath the drooping willows.
What a beautiful scene, I'm delighted to accompany it, and
All the dust on my robe is washed away.⁴³³

.....

四门子

...问仙姝来怎迟？金缕歌，象板催，乐陶陶尽拚沉醉归。锦瑟又弹，凤管又吹，一弄儿歌声润美。⁴³⁴

[To the tune] Four Doormen

...Why does the beautiful immortal lady delay in coming?
With the golden-threaded song, the ivory clappers urge,
Joyfully getting completely drunk before returning home.
The brocade zither is played again, the phoenix flute is blown again, and
A beautiful voice is brought forth in one play.

⁴³³ The phrase “dust-laden robe 尘襟” metaphorically represents the weariness and burdens accumulated from life’s journey.

⁴³⁴ Wang Qi, Hong Bozhao, and Xie Boyang, *Yuan Ming Qing sanqu xuan* 元明清散曲选 [A selection of *sanqu* from the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties], 279-81.

Indeed, the pleasure derived from appreciating nature is a recurring theme in Ming *sanqu*. Another example is the following *sanqu* by the official-literati Chang Lun: “To admire the eastern suburbs, indulge in pleasures when young, the most pleasant time is the spring. 赏东郊，少年行乐，最称意是春朝。”⁴³⁵

Joy can also be elicited through humour and ridicule. Humour — often of a sarcastic variety — was highly valued in Ming era entertainment venues, as it could quickly lighten the mood and elicit positive responses from the audience. According to James I. Crump (1993), a “bantering tone” frequently permeated *sanqu* lyrics, with these compositions frequently venturing into the realm of complex satire.⁴³⁶ Drawing on classical Chinese while addressing everyday concerns in a straight-forward, down-to-earth manner – and, crucially, with humour – *sanqu* naturally became one of the most popular musical forms in brothel contexts, where literati were the primary clientele.

To generate a quick and strong positive response, Ming era *sanqu* and other *xiaoqu* (popular ditties) often lampooned characters typically encountered in brothels. Many songs had simple, self-explanatory titles that labelled characters according to their roles (e.g., “prostitute” or “procuress/false mother”), with adjectives describing their appearance or temperament preceding these labels. The lyrics to these songs are often straightforward and raunchy. For example, a *xiaoqu* in Feng Menglong’s *Shan’ge*, titled “A Slim Prostitute 瘦妓”, explains:

嫖小娘子没嫖个胖婆娘，宁可增钱瘦的更好。你不见肥猪肉吃了一两块便觉油烟气，用牙齿咬烤骨头里头香。

You had better avoid fat girls if you visit a prostitute,

A slim one is better even if you pay extra money.

Don’t you know that pork fat tastes greasy even after only a few bites?

roasted spare ribs are much tastier when you bite into them.⁴³⁷

[Ōki and Santangelo translation]

⁴³⁵ Wang Qi, Hong Bozhao, and Xie Boyang, *Yuan Ming Qing sanqu xuan* 元明清散曲选 [A selection of *sanqu* from the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties], 286.

⁴³⁶ Crump, *Song-poems from Xanadu*, 69-70.

⁴³⁷ Ōki and Santangelo, *Shan’ge, the ‘Mountain Songs’: Love Songs in Ming China*, 213. This text is listed alongside another closely related song in Feng’s collection: *Zhuangji* 壮妓 “A strong courtesan”. There are other related songs in Feng’s popular song anthology, *Gua Zhi’er* 挂枝儿 (Hanging Branches). For example, *bao’er* 鸨儿 “Procuress”, and *zheji* 者妓 “A Pettish courtesan”.

In these lyrics, courtesans are categorized according to their physical size, and making love with them is likened to eating pork. This approach is both satirical and dismissive of the lowly service-providing profession.

Another *xiaoqu* from *Shan'ge* titled “Bigfoot courtesan” (大脚妓 *dajiao ji*) mocks courtesans with large feet:

嫖小娘莫拣大脚个嫖，渠个脚力忒大那相交。就是送个物事来渠也难理会，一双鞋面还要贴换两三遭。

If you visit a prostitute, you had better not choose one whose feet are not bound, she will have too much strength in her legs, and how can you make love with her? Even as you enter her, she wouldn't notice despite your efforts in love-making. If she has a pair of shoes, you would need to change the uppers two or three times.⁴³⁸
[Ōki and Santangelo translation]

The following *sanqu* was probably not part of the courtesans' performance repertoire since it is narrated from a first-person perspective and persuades a courtesan to reform and get married. However, the lyrics highlight some defining features of the profession: the emphasis on physical beauty, skilful singing and dancing, and witty chatting styles. Here, the author expresses the concern for the courtesan's future and frustration at her failure to leave the profession. Again, the sentiments and ideas expressed do not directly relate to the courtesan-client love process:

一枝花
代人劝歌者从良。歌者，乡外乐籍中角妓，善于歌舞
.....卖俏家门，歌舞为营运，诙谐是立身。燕莺期甚日成巢，鸳鸯债何时证本？
.....唱的来唇乾口燥，舞的来眼晕头昏。.....你便有百般娇、十分俊，眼见的白发新添镜里人；早寻个叶落归根。.....稳拍拍的前程不须问，趁着你蝶粉蜂黄尚存，若得这凤友鸾交做亲，不愿从良你也算的是个蠢!⁴³⁹

⁴³⁸ Ōki and Santangelo, *Shan'ge, the 'Mountain Songs': Love Songs in Ming China*, 214.

⁴³⁹ Wang Qi, Hong Bozhao, and Xie Boyang, *Yuan Ming Qing sanqu xuan* 元明清散曲选 [A selection of

[To the tune] A Spray of Flowers

For the One Who Persuades the Singer to Reform (leave the courtesan profession)

[Commentaries] The singer, a skilled courtesan from the outskirts, belongs to the Household of Music, good at singing and dancing.

...With coquettish charm at her doorstep,

She makes her living through song and dance, using wit as her foundation.

When will the swallows build their nests, and when will the mandarin duck debts be repaid?

...She sings till her lips dry, and dances till she's dizzy...

...Even if you have all the grace and beauty, soon grey hair will be added to the reflection in the mirror;

So, find a place where fallen leaves return to their roots.

...Don't worry about the future,

Take advantage of your youth while you still have it.

If you can marry a phoenix-like friend for a harmonious relationship,

It would be foolish to not be willing to turn over a new leaf!

4.8 Emotional Processes in the Courtesans' Performance

Having explored the types of emotion commonly expressed in the song texts associated with the courtesan profession, it is now time to consider further questions: how did the Ming-era courtesans engage in emotional communication with their listeners in the performance context? How did their music influence the moods and emotions of the audience? The courtesans' artistry emphasised the full spectrum of sensory experiences, employing words, melodies, timbres, gestures, colour, fragrance and much more to create certain moods and atmospheres and influence others' emotions – a key feature discussed in detail in section “signalling seduction” (see Chapter 6). Here, in the ensuing paragraphs, I argue that establishing an empathic connection – affect attunement – between courtesan and clients was

sanqu from the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties], 236. Written by the Ming dramatist Zhu Youdun.

a crucial enabling component in these processes of mood creation and emotional communication. Affect attunement, according to the psychoanalyst Daniel N. Stern, is “the performance of behaviours that express the quality of feeling of a shared affect state without imitating the exact behavioural expression of the inner state.”⁴⁴⁰ Surely, if a courtesan was unable to establish sufficient empathic connection with her clients (and vice versa), then her performances would have been much less successful in achieving the desired emotional goals.

To my knowledge, empathy and other related concepts of music and emotion have not yet explicitly been a concern in the field of Ming courtesans’ music. At this point, it is necessary to briefly introduce “empathy”. The notion of empathy first appeared in the field of psychology, with American psychologist Edward Titchener coining the term in 1909. Titchener drew from the nineteenth-century German aesthetic concept *Einfühlung* (“*ein*” means “within” or “unity” and “*fühlung*” means “feeling, sensation”) and stemmed from the Greek root *empathēia* (“*em*” refers to “within” and “*pátheia*” means “affect”).⁴⁴¹ Providing the first succinct and convincing definition of empathy, Titchener stated that one cannot understand another’s consciousness by analogy from one’s own mental processes; rather, one can only do so by inner imitation.⁴⁴²

At this point, the distinction between sympathy and empathy is worth clarifying, as the definitions of the two are often conflated. According to Elisabeth Pacherie, sympathy denotes sharing others’ emotions with altruistic intent and partaking in their emotional experience in a more general sense. In comparison, empathy can be understood as “emotional sympathy”, or “fellow feeling for another person”,⁴⁴³ is a kind of capacity to put oneself in someone else’s place in order to understand what the person is feeling and experiencing, yet without necessarily becoming emotionally involved.⁴⁴⁴ Furthermore, in the case of empathy, the

⁴⁴⁰ Daniel N. Stern, *The interpersonal world of the infant: A view from psychoanalysis and developmental psychology* (New York: Routledge, 2018 [first published 1998]), 142. Also see: Juslin, *Musical emotions explained: Unlocking the secrets of musical affect*, 93-94.

⁴⁴¹ For a discussion of the origin of the term “empathy”, see: Filippo Bonini Baraldi, *Roma Music and Emotion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 244-47.

⁴⁴² Edward B. Titchener, *Experimental Psychology of the Thought Processes* (New York: Macmillan, 1909), 21.

⁴⁴³ Bonini Baraldi, *Roma Music and Emotion*, 246-47.

⁴⁴⁴ Elisabeth Pacherie, “L’empathie et ses degrés,” in *L’empathie*, ed. A. Berthoz and G. Jorland (Paris: Odile

object need not necessarily be a person, but could also be a landscape, painting, melody, or suchlike.⁴⁴⁵ As Theodor Lipps and Andrea Pinotti point out, empathy depends on the subject's ability to endow the object with spiritual content and meaning.⁴⁴⁶

So how does empathy arise in musical performance? Lipps believes that "aesthetic empathy" can be grounded in a kind of "resonance" that "can exist between some forms and the properties of the subject, attributing it to the states of mind induced by musical elements."⁴⁴⁷ At the same time, the performer must take certain steps to establish an empathic connection – securing the listeners' attentions, interests, and confidence as they attempt to convey the intended emotional content. Meanwhile, to a certain extent, empathy is a natural and inevitable feature of the human condition, occurring via the phenomenon known as "emotional contagion", whereby people perceive emotional expression in others (especially in the voice and in gestures), automatically imitate and synchronise their own expressions, voices, postures, and actions, and thereafter converge emotionally in their inner worlds.⁴⁴⁸

In essence, emotional contagion is the core process by which emotion is transmitted from one person to another.⁴⁴⁹ Juslin and Laukka (2004) further help us to understand this phenomenon within the field of music and emotion.⁴⁵⁰ Here, it has been demonstrated that emotional content expressed through the voice is especially contagious, producing mirrored

Jacob, 2004), 149-50. Quoted in Bonini Baraldi, *Roma Music and Emotion*, 246.

⁴⁴⁵ Bonini Baraldi, *Roma Music and Emotion*, 247.

⁴⁴⁶ Theodor Lipps, "Ästhetik" [Aesthetics] " in *Estetica ed empatia*, ed. A. Pinotti (Milan: Guerini Studio, 1997 [1908]), 183. Andrea Pinotti, *Estetica ed empatia* (Milan: Guerini Studio, 1997 [1909]), 28. Quoted in Bonini Baraldi, *Roma Music and Emotion*, 248-49.

⁴⁴⁷ Lipps states that musical elements can include "pitch of sounds, timbre and intensity, consonance and dissonance, richness and simplicity, the abruptness or fluidity of a passage, tempo and rhythm, and shifting dynamics." Lipps, "Ästhetik" [Aesthetics] " 187. Quoted in Bonini Baraldi, *Roma Music and Emotion*, 250.

⁴⁴⁸ Bonini Baraldi, *Roma Music and Emotion*, 241-43. Elaine Hatfield, John T. Cacioppo, and Richard L. Rapson, "Emotional contagion," *Current directions in psychological science* 2, no. 3 (1993): 96.

⁴⁴⁹ Hatfield, Cacioppo, and Rapson, "Emotional contagion," 96.

⁴⁵⁰ Juslin and Laukka, "Expression, perception, and induction of musical emotions: A review and a questionnaire study of everyday listening," 281-84.

emotional responses in listeners.⁴⁵¹ For example, Skyler Hawk, Agneta Fischer, and Gerben Kleef's 2012 study shows that subjects who heard vocalizations containing emotions such as anger, happiness, and sadness produced specific facial expressions and self-reported emotions consistent with those vocalizations.⁴⁵² One assumes that the same phenomena would have prevailed in the Ming courtesans' arena also.

4.8.1 Establishing Empathy: Emotional Transmission and Response

As has been detailed earlier, the Ming era literati community, who constituted the courtesans' main audience, were fascinated by *qing* and the *qing*-rich arts of music and poetry. Accordingly, the courtesans must have attributed extensive care and attention to establishing and sustaining a state of empathic connection with their male guests, and appropriately and effectively transmitting different kinds of emotion through music (via processes of emotional contagion), while always being sensitive to aesthetic sensibilities. In the following sections, I explore these processes of emotional communication from two perspectives – the presentation and transmission of emotion by the courtesan and the reception and feedback by the audience. For the empathetic communication to be optimal, both parties are involved in signalling and responding in a bidirectional fashion.

⁴⁵¹ Jari K. Hietanen, Veikko Surakka, and Ilkka Linnankoski, "Facial electromyographic responses to vocal affect expressions," *Psychophysiology* 35, no. 5 (1998). Roland Neumann and Fritz Strack, "Mood contagion: The automatic transfer of mood between persons," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 79, no. 2 (2000).

⁴⁵² Skyler T. Hawk, Agneta H. Fischer, and Gerben A. Van Kleef, "Face the noise: Embodied responses to nonverbal vocalizations of discrete emotions," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 102, no. 4 (2012).

4.8.1.1 *The courtesan as transmitter of emotion*

Within the performance arena, courtesans were performers and transmitters of emotion. Their goal was to emulate certain target emotions (if they were not actually experiencing them for real at that time) and use their artistry to convey those emotions to the listener-receivers, guiding them towards certain moods. To enable this process to occur effectively, they needed to be very sensitive to the listeners' aesthetic preferences, as well as their needs and desires – skilfully selecting and interpreting repertoire to suit the moment, while creating and playing with expectations to foment interest and excitement. Research has shown that anticipation is one of the key factors in stimulating musical pleasure and activating the reward system, and that unexpected changes in musical intensity, tempo and patterning can trigger strong emotional responses in listeners.⁴⁵³

As conveyors of musical emotion, courtesans needed to be aware of the qualities of sound that are effective and emotionally powerful in the process of emotional contagion. The goal was to develop what music psychological term “super-expressive voices”,⁴⁵⁴ exploiting the natural qualities of their voices and applying vocal artistry – subtle articulation, grace notes, dynamic changes in pitch and volume, and much more – to convey emotional content with striking directness, and thereby evoke strong responses in others. Instrumental music could also be super-expressive. Juslin argues that certain instruments (such as strings, including violin and cello) can emulate the human voice while, at the same time, offering greater scope in terms of speed, range, intensity, and timbre, making them sometimes even more effective at evoking emotion than human voice.⁴⁵⁵ The following examples from Ming literature demonstrate the emotional power of courtesans' instrumental music.

The first example of a super-expressive instrumental performance played by Ming courtesans comes from the short story “The Dragon-and-Tiger Reunion of Shi Hongzhao the

⁴⁵³ Valorie N. Salimpoor et al., "Anatomically distinct dopamine release during anticipation and experience of peak emotion to music," *Nature neuroscience* 14, no. 2 (2011).

⁴⁵⁴ Juslin, *Musical emotions explained: Unlocking the secrets of musical affect*, 165-66; 291.

⁴⁵⁵ Juslin, *Musical emotions explained: Unlocking the secrets of musical affect*, 292.

Minister and His Friend the King”, in which a courtesan named Wang Ying presents a flute performance at a banquet that delights the listeners: “...Wang Ying, with fingers as delicate as spring bamboo shoots and tender buds, played a tune on a flute inlaid with gold threads and a dragon head. The resounding and melodious music greatly enthralled the audience. 这王英以纤纤春笋柔荑，捧著一管缠金丝龙笛，当筵品弄一曲。吹得清音嘹亮，美韵悠扬，众官听之大喜。”⁴⁵⁶ The flute can also evoke negative emotions. For example, the Ming book *Yan Yi Bian* 艳异编 (A Collection of Luscious and Indulgent Love Affairs) includes the following description: “The Emperor personally played the jade flute, providing the melody for her (the concubine Yuhuan’s) singing. As the song ended, they looked at each other, all unable to hide their tears. 上亲御玉笛，为之倚曲。曲罢相视，无不掩泣。”⁴⁵⁷

Meanwhile, courtesans’ *pipa*-playing was often deemed particularly effective at rendering emotions of melancholy and sadness. *Jiu Jing Yi Shi* 旧京遗事 (Anecdotes of the Old Capital), written by the Ming scholar Shi Xuan 史玄 (?-1648), describes a tavern famous for their sophisticated *pipa* playing (most likely performed by courtesans as taverns were one of their usual workplaces), evoking feelings of sadness and nostalgia among the listeners:

楼北有杨家琵琶也，月明之夜，往往弹琵琶，唱至斗转，繁弦密指，慷慨萧凉，南客泣听吞声而起五湖之思也。⁴⁵⁸

To the north of the building there was the Yang Family *Pipa* Tavern. On bright moonlit nights, the performers (courtesans) would often play the *pipa* and sing to the point where the Big Dipper seemed to rotate, their dense strings and nimble fingers producing a grand and bleak melody. This often moved the southern guests to tears, swallowing their sobs and stirring up thoughts of the five lakes in their homeland.

⁴⁵⁶ Feng Menglong, *Stories Old and New* 古今小说 [1620], 253.

⁴⁵⁷ Wang Yanzhou, *Yan yi bian* 艳异编 [A collection of luscious and indulgent love affairs] [1571-1596], 172.

⁴⁵⁸ Shi Xuan, *Jiu jing yi shi* 旧京遗事 [Anecdotes of the old capital].

However, in disagreement with Patrik Juslin's forementioned opinion, I propose that – in the Ming context at least – vocal music was best suited to ensuring effective emotional contagion and strong emotional responses, simply because it prominently featured the crucial dimension of already richly emotive lyrics. Ancient Chinese music connoisseurs widely believed that vocal music, which was culturally considered feminine, contained strong emotional power,⁴⁵⁹ and Ming period literati, such as Feng Menglong, highly praised popular songs (*xiaoqu*, or *shidiao*) because the texts were filled with “sincere emotion” expressed in a straightforward manner. Those songs remained extremely popular throughout the mid- to late-Ming period on account of their emotive potential.

What, then, are the prerequisites for a musical performance to successfully evoke emotional contagion among listeners? I argue that successful emotional contagion depends on two factors, namely, the way in which the performer interprets the musical features relating to emotional expression (such as pitch inflections, melodic contours, dynamics and so on) and the listener's state of perception (which will be discussed in the next section, “The audience as receiver and responder”). Furthermore, I argue that perceived sincerity – the sense that the emotions being conveyed are genuinely felt to some extent – may be more significant in the transmission of emotion than performing skills. A moving musical performance does not necessarily require the performer to self-evoke felt emotion during the performance; in fact, sincere-seeming expression can be mastered to a considerable extent through training.⁴⁶⁰ Of course, a certain degree of skill is necessary for the success of emotional contagion. I suggest that it was precisely because the Ming literati held *zhenqing* (sincere emotion) in high esteem that “genuine playing” became a highly regarded performance style in the Ming entertainment sphere.

There are numerous Ming period sources that allude to the courtesans' skills at modifying their vocal delivery to promote certain moods and shared emotional responses among the listeners. An often-mentioned tactic is singing in a low-pitched voice at a slow

⁴⁵⁹ Zeitlin, “‘Notes of Flesh’ and the Courtesan's Song in Seventeenth-Century China,” 79-80.

⁴⁶⁰ Patrik N. Juslin et al., “Feedback learning of musical expressivity,” in *Musical excellence: Strategies and techniques to enhance performance*, ed. Aaron Williamson (Oxford: Oxford University press, 2004).

tempo, often to a string accompaniment, to evoke a melancholy mood. The term *didi chang* 低低唱, denoting “singing in a low voice”, appears often in the novel *Jin Ping Mei*. For example, during one episode, in order to match the melancholy sentiment of a heroine who is missing her lover in the song lyrics, the courtesan Wu Yin'er sings in a low voice: “(She) placed the *pipa* on her knees, and sang in a low voice a song to the tune ‘The Willows Dangle Their Gold’ ...”⁴⁶¹

In other episodes, one reads of courtesans singing loudly to capture people’s attentions and lift their moods. For example, Chapter 73 of *Jin Ping Mei* includes the following description of blind Sister Yü’s midnight performance at a banquet: “Big Sister Yü, thereupon, tuned the strings of her instrument and sang in a loud voice the song suite that begins with the tune ‘Interlaced Jade Branches’ ...”⁴⁶²

As mentioned earlier, in a great many cases, the courtesans’ vocal performances involved the skilful emulation of emotion – the acting out of emotional states, in a similar fashion to an actor – typically in accordance with the contents of song texts. They did not really have to feel the emotion. For example, the collection of short stories and anecdotes *Yan Yi Bian* 艳异编 records that the courtesan Ding Lingling “was good at singing, and whenever she performed in a mournful tune, the listeners were always moved, or even shed tears. 平生善歌，每作哀怨之音，则闻者动容，或至流涕。”⁴⁶³ Here, the use of the character 作 (*zuo*, meaning “act, perform”) suggests that Ling Ling’s mournful voice was strategically applied for the purposes of emulating sorrowful emotion. Additionally, it is recorded in *Miscellaneous Records of the Plank Bridge* that when Yin Chun, a courtesan who was good at opera singing, performed on stage, “the tragic pathos was so intense, as her singing mingled with tears, that the entire audience was enthralled. Even seasoned opera

⁴⁶¹ David Tod Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume Three: The Aphrodisiac*, Princeton Library of Asian Translations, (Princeton, New Jersey, and Chichester, West Sussex: Princeton University Press, 2006), 91.

⁴⁶² David Tod Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume Four: The Climax*, Princeton Library of Asian Translations, (Princeton, New Jersey, and Chichester, West Sussex: Princeton University Press, 2011), 407.

⁴⁶³ From the short story *Jiaohong Ji* 娇红记 (The Story of Jiaohong). See: Wang Yanzhou, *Yan yi bian* 艳异编 [A collection of luscious and indulgent love affairs] [1571-1596], 280.

singers sighed and acknowledged her superiority.⁴⁶⁴ 悲壮淋漓，声泪俱迸，一座尽倾，老梨园自叹弗及。” Although we cannot tell whether Yin Chun’s tears were genuine, it is safe to infer that a preeminent courtesan-singer would have possessed sufficient virtuosity to present a seemingly sincere expression.

Of course, there must have been many occasions when courtesans selected repertoire that matched their current feelings, enabling artistic exploration of truly felt emotion, and thereby triggering an especially pronounced empathetic response in the audience. The following example, taken from the short story “Mr. Dugu Has the Strangest Dream on His Journey Home”, illustrates this. Here, the female protagonist, Bai, is forced to sing and drink with a group of young men, infusing her performance with her genuine sadness:

白氏恐怕罚酒，又只得和泪而歌。歌云：萤火穿白杨，悲风入芦草。疑是梦中游，愁迷故园道。白氏这歌，一发前声不接后气，恰如啼残的杜宇，叫断的哀猿。满座闻之，尽觉凄然。

Fearing another vessel of wine, Bai-shi started singing again, tearfully: Fireflies wing their way among the poplars; gusts of doleful wind stir the weeds. Could I be walking in a dream? The path to my home is shrouded in grief. Like the plaintive cries of a cuckoo or a gibbon, this song with its broken notes saddened everyone around the table.⁴⁶⁵ [Shuhui Yang and Yunqin Yang translation]

4.8.1.2 *The audience as receiver and responder*

In a successful musical performance, the courtesan-performer skilfully handles the musical materials to represent particular emotions, and the listeners perceive the given signals and respond accordingly – experiencing emotions of their own, as well as other cognitive and physical responses, which are mood-enhancing to some degree and go some way towards meeting the courtesan’s goals. It is a rather subtle and complicated process. In this section, I

⁴⁶⁴ Yu Huai, "Miscellaneous Records of the Plank Bridge 板桥杂记 [1693]," 84-85. Translated by Wai-ye Li.

⁴⁶⁵ Feng Menglong, *Stories to Awaken the World* 醒世恒言 [1627], 581.

ponder the listeners' responses and the mechanisms behind this emotional evocation process, focusing in particular on the goal of promoting peak experiences, the prevalence of visual imagery, and the key role of episodic memory (recalling past experiences).

In Ming texts, one often encounters the exaggerated responses of literati listeners to brilliant performances, describing their “peak experiences”. Humanistic psychologist Abraham Maslow’s exploratory study shows that such “peak experiences” of music are in fact not common.⁴⁶⁶ For some listeners, they only experience it once or a few times in their lifetime.⁴⁶⁷ For a variety of reasons, some people may have this experience more frequently than others, possibly because they have a strong interest in music; they may be more open to experience,⁴⁶⁸ or have a particular auditory style;⁴⁶⁹ they may be at an adolescent stage with a strong interest in music, or simply lucky.

If peak experiences are so rare, why are descriptions of them so common in Ming dynasty sources? The answer may lie in the high value placed on *qing* and emotion by the Ming era literati music connoisseurs, which led them to remain quite open to emotional experience, and to cultivate and appreciate hyper-sensitivity. Such people were keen to demonstrate to others how sensitive they were and how deeply and intensely they responded to stimuli – especially artistic stimuli.

When describing peak experiences, Ming authors often employ the metaphor of “shaking of the souls and spirits” (*shenhun* 神魂, *shenpo dongdang* 魂魄动荡) to exaggerate the listener’s shocked reaction to an influential musical performance. This response is also associated with the state of awe, where the subject experiences being overwhelmed by the powerful impact of an object – something physically vast, or something small yet possessing

⁴⁶⁶ Abraham H. Maslow, *Toward a psychology of being* (Simon and Schuster, 2013), 64.

⁴⁶⁷ Alf Gabrielsson, *Strong experiences with music: Music is much more than just music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3+225.

⁴⁶⁸ Robert R. McCrae, "Aesthetic chills as a universal marker of openness to experience," *Motivation and Emotion* 31, no. 1 (2007): 5-11.

⁴⁶⁹ Warren Brodsky, John A. Sloboda, and Mitchell G. Waterman, "An exploratory investigation into auditory style as a correlate and predictor of music performance anxiety," *Medical problems of performing artists* 9, no. 4 (1994): 101-12.

great energy, genius or complexity. The term “awe” is often used to express profound admiration for a person’s beauty or skill, or appreciation of natural or manmade beauty.⁴⁷⁰ Below I will cite two examples of peak musical experiences described in Ming dynasty sources, both illustrating in exaggerated ways music’s potential to evince a radical transformation or even transportation of the soul. The first example comes from the short story “With Her Wisdom Zhang Shu’er Helps Mr. Yang Escape”, in which a young girl’s zither performance stuns Scholar Huang:

见舱中一幼女年未及笄.....燃兰膏，焚凤脑，纤手如玉，抚箏而弹。须臾曲罢，兰销篆灭，杳无所闻矣。那时黄生神魂俱荡，如逢神女仙妃，薛琼琼辈又不足道也。

He saw a young girl in her early teens.....She added fragrant oil to the lamp, lit the incense burner, and began to play her zither again with her slender fingers. After she finished, the lamp dimmed, the incense burned out, and the air was as still as before. As if in a trance [original translation: his soul and spirit were both shaken], Scholar Huang felt that he was in the presence of a divine maiden to whom the likes of Xue Qionggiongg could hardly compare.⁴⁷¹ [Shuhui Yang and Yunqin Yang translation]

Another example comes from the short story “Du Shiniang Sinks Her Jewel Box in Anger”, when the protagonist Li, alone at night with the courtesan Shiniang, recalls his first encounter when he was struck by her singing: “Your voice is the very best in the courtesans’ quarters. When I first met you, my soul took flight every time I heard you sing. 恩卿妙音，六院推首。某相遇之初，每闻绝调，辄不禁神魂之飞动。”⁴⁷²

Another intriguingly prevalent practice in Ming literature, including lyrics, poems, and novels, was to describe musical features in visual terms, typically through allusion to vivid and dramatic natural phenomena. Such descriptions attempt to convey significant features in

⁴⁷⁰ David Sander and Klaus Scherer, *Oxford companion to emotion and the affective sciences* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 5.

⁴⁷¹ Feng Menglong, *Stories to Awaken the World* 醒世恒言 [1627], 750.

⁴⁷² Feng Menglong, *Stories to Caution the World* 警世通言 [1624], 557.

the most powerful musical expression and experience. A typical example is the description of a woman's *zheng* performance in the short story "Scholar Huang Is Blessed with Divine Aid through His Jade-Horse Pendant":

乍雄乍细，若沉若浮，或如雁语长空，
或如鹤鸣旷野，或如清泉赴壑，或如乱雨洒窗。

Now majestic, now gentle,
Now deep-toned, now floating,
Now like geese crying in the sky,
Now like cranes singing in the wilderness.
Now like a clear stream flowing to a ravine,
Now like wild raindrops beating on the window.⁴⁷³
[Shuhui Yang and Yunqin Yang translation]

Here, the author uses diverse nature-related imagery to convey the music's subtle movements, extra-musical associations, and connotations – bringing the women's virtuoso *zheng* performances to life for the reader.

As explained by Juslin, the process of conjuring up images while listening to music is known as "visual imagery".⁴⁷⁴ Specifically, mental imagery occurs when listeners conceptualize musical structures through non-verbal mappings between the metaphorical affordances of music and patterns of images rooted in bodily experience.⁴⁷⁵ In other words, the structure and characteristics of the music naturally evoke a distinctly visual narrative that unfolds in the listener's mind over time.

For example, a solo melodic line might remind one of the movements of a bird flying through the air, while undulating musical patterns could remind the listener of waves on the

⁴⁷³ Feng Menglong, *Stories to Awaken the World* 醒世恒言 [1627], 750.

⁴⁷⁴ Juslin, *Musical emotions explained: Unlocking the secrets of musical affect*, 331.

⁴⁷⁵ Lakoff George and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

sea.⁴⁷⁶ In Ming period sources, the contours of monophonic music (such as vocal singing or solo flute playing) were often described through spatial metaphor, referring to dramatic occurrences in the natural world. For example, in the short story “The Dragon-and-Tiger Reunion of Shi Hongzhao the Minister and His Friend the King”, the courtesan Wang Ying is praised for her flute playing:

忽闻碧玉楼头笛，声透晴空碧。
宫、商、角、羽任西东，映我奇观惊起碧潭龙。

Suddenly, the flute, on the jade terrace,
A sound rising to heaven on high.
The notes glide up and down the scale,
Stirring the green pond dragon, a wondrous sight.⁴⁷⁷
[Shuhui Yang and Yunqin Yang translation]

Another example can be found in the short story “Du Shiniang Sinks Her Jewel Box in Anger”, where the courtesan Shiniang’s singing is described as follows: “Her voice rose into the sky and stopped the clouds, dived down into the deep spring and brought out the fish. 声飞霄汉云皆驻，响入深泉鱼出游。”⁴⁷⁸ Here, the visualisation serves not only to convey certain key attributes of the music – most obviously the direction and character of melodic movement – but also to convey the music’s immense impact. Specifically, this music is even able to “stop the clouds from moving”, imagery dating back to the Warring States period (475 BC/403 BC-221 BC) with the idiom of *xiang jie xingyun* 响遏行云, describing sound rising to the sky and stopping the flowing clouds.⁴⁷⁹ The Yuan period (1271-1368) biographical book *Qinglou Ji* 青楼集 (A Collection of Brothels), which records the Yuan era courtesan-

⁴⁷⁶ Gabrielsson, *Strong experiences with music: Music is much more than just music*, 356-57.

⁴⁷⁷ Feng Menglong, *Stories Old and New* 古今小说 [1620], 253.

⁴⁷⁸ Feng Menglong, *Stories to Caution the World* 警世通言 [1624], 557. Shuhui Yang and Yunqin Yang’s translation.

⁴⁷⁹ Liezi, *Lie zi ji shi* 列子集释 [Liezi’s collection and commentaries] (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1997), 177.

performers' life experiences, also includes two passages praising courtesans' beautiful singing voices as "voices that can stop the moving clouds" 声遏行云.⁴⁸⁰ The short story "Mr. Dugu Has the Strangest Dream on His Journey Home" also imbues the charming yet mournful singing voice of the female character, Bai, with supernatural powers: "...her charming voice, her mournful tone, the sweet melody, and the appealing inflections could have stopped birds in their flight and inspired fish to dance in the water. 声调清婉, 音韵悠扬, 真个直令高鸟停飞, 潜鱼起舞。"⁴⁸¹

Other commonly seen imagery is that of a courtesan's music-making being so powerful that it can even "crack stones", as illustrated in the Ming period story "The Dragon-and-Tiger Reunion of Shi Hongzhao the Minister and His Friend the King" and in the Ming novel *Gu Wang Yan* 姑妄言 (Preposterous Words):

穿云裂石响无踪, 惊动梅花初谢玉玲珑。

(The sound of courtesan Wang Ying's flute) vanishing into clouds with a rock-splitting clap, making plum blossoms fall like pieces of jade.⁴⁸²

.....

钱贵又叫代目取过弦子来, 弹著唱了一支《红拂记》上虬髯落店的昆腔曲子.....她玉指轻挑, 檀唇慢吐, 真有绕梁裂石之音, 令人听得心旷神怡。⁴⁸³

(The courtesan) Qian Gui called Dai Mu to bring the string *xianzi* to her, playing it while singing a *kunqu* song from the drama "Girl with the Red Whisk" ... Her jade fingers lightly pick and her sandalwood lips slowly express, her voice truly twining around the beams and cracking stones, making the listeners relaxed and happy.

⁴⁸⁰ 赛帘秀, "声遏行云, 乃古今绝唱。" 陈婆惜, "善弹唱, 声遏行云, ..." For Sai Lianxiu, "her singing voice could make the moving clouds stop, truly an unparalleled singing of all times." As for Chen Poxi, "excellent at playing and singing, her voice could make the moving clouds stop..." See: *Qing lou ji* 青楼集 [Brothel collection], (Taipei: Ting-wen Bookstore 鼎文书局, 1976).

⁴⁸¹ Feng Menglong, *Stories to Awaken the World* 醒世恒言 [1627], 578. Shuhui Yang and Yunqin Yang's translation.

⁴⁸² Feng Menglong, *Stories Old and New* 古今小说 [1620], 253. Shuhui Yang and Yunqin Yang's translation.

⁴⁸³ Cao Qujing, *Gu wang yan xia* 姑妄言 下 [Preposterous words, volume 3] [1730].

Next, I will probe another emotional process that is sometimes referred to in Ming period accounts of musical experience – the mechanism of episodic memory. Specifically, the powerful process of emotional evocation where musical details trigger certain memories of a specific event and associated emotions for the listener.⁴⁸⁴ According to Peter Lang's theory of emotional imagery, the intensity of the emotion – either prevalent or intense – might be attributed to the fact that the physiological responses to the original event are stored in memories, along with the experiential content.⁴⁸⁵

Episodic memory can be depicted through recollection. For example, a certain stimulus might compel a person to recall a song that they once heard while travelling in a city at a particular time. However, episodic memory involves more than merely remembering certain information; rather, it is characterised by re-experiencing a very precise particular experience as “mental replay”, which can be remarkably vivid in nature.⁴⁸⁶

The Ming period accounts of musical experience sometimes include references to music-induced episodic memory, wherein listeners encounter particular stimuli – most commonly lyrics – that trigger intense memories and associated emotions. A typical example can be found in *Jin Ping Mei*, when the protagonist Ximen Qing cannot not help but crying when he hears a line of lyrics at the funeral of his beloved concubine Li Ping'er:

贴旦扮玉箫唱了一回。西门庆看唱到「今生难会，固此上寄丹青」一句，忽想起李瓶儿病时模样，不觉心中感触起来，止不住眼中泪落，袖中不住取汗巾儿擦拭。

The t'ieh-tan, playing the part of Yü-hsiao, then proceeded to sing for a while.

When Ximen Qing heard the player sing the words:

In this life we are unlikely to meet again.

For this reason, I bequeath this self-portrait to you.

it suddenly brought to mind the image of Li Ping'er on her sickbed, and his heart was so moved that he couldn't help starting to shed tears, which he wiped away constantly with a handkerchief.⁴⁸⁷ [David Roy translation]

⁴⁸⁴ Juslin, *Musical emotions explained: Unlocking the secrets of musical affect*, 316.

⁴⁸⁵ Peter J. Lang, "A bio-informational theory of emotional imagery," *Psychophysiology* 16, no. 6 (1979): 495.

⁴⁸⁶ Endel Tulving, "Episodic memory: From mind to brain," *Annual Review of Psychology* 53, no. 1 (2002): 19-20. Juslin, *Musical emotions explained: Unlocking the secrets of musical affect*, 317.

⁴⁸⁷ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume Four: The Climax*, 101.

In this example, Ximen Qing reacts with strong sad emotions when he hears a certain sentimental lyric reminding him of moments spent with his deceased lover. A related example can be found in the Ming novel *Yan Yi Bian* (A Collection of Luscious and Indulgent Love Affairs) when Emperor Wu is longing for his deceased wife Li:

武帝思怀往者李夫人不可得复时，始穿昆灵之池，泛翔禽之舟。帝自造歌曲，使女伶歌之。时日已西倾，凉风激水，女伶歌声甚迥，因赋落叶哀蝉之曲曰：「罗袂兮无声，玉墀兮尘生。虚房冷而寂寞，落叶依于重扃。望彼美之女兮，安得感馀心之未宁。」帝闻唱动心，闷闷不自支。特命龙膏之烛以照舟内，悲不自止。⁴⁸⁸

When Emperor Wu longed for the deceased Lady Li of the past, he began to dredge the Kunling Pond and sailed on a boat named “Soaring Bird”. The Emperor himself composed songs and had the female singers sing them. As the day drew to a close, with a cool breeze stirring the water, the singers’ voices resonated deeply, prompting the Emperor to compose a song lamenting the fallen leaves and mournful cicadas, which goes, “The silk sleeves are silent, and the jade steps are covered in dust. The empty room is cold and lonely, with fallen leaves gathering against the closed doors. Gazing at the beautiful lady from afar, how can I quell the unrest in my heart?” Hearing the song, the Emperor’s heart was moved, and he was enveloped in sadness, unable to support himself. He specifically commanded that candles made of dragon ointment be lit inside the boat to illuminate it as his sorrow was unceasing.

Another example is from Feng Menglong’s songbook *Gua Zhi'er*. Feng recounted that whenever he read the lyrics of two popular songs left to him by the courtesan Feng Xi, it conjured up poignant memories:

呜呼！人面桃花，已成梦境。每阅二词，依稀绕梁声在耳畔也。佳人难再，千古同怜。伤哉！⁴⁸⁹

⁴⁸⁸ Wang Yanzhou, *Yan yi bian* 艳异编 [A collection of luscious and indulgent love affairs] [1571-1596], 84.

⁴⁸⁹ Feng Menglong, *Gua zhi'er shan'ge taixia xinzou* 挂枝儿 山歌 太霞新奏 [Hanging branches, mountain songs, new music of Taixia], 45-46.

Wellaway! Her face was like peach blossom, but it has become a dream. Every time I read these two song-lyrics, I can still vaguely hear her beautiful voice in my ears, twining around the beams. Such a beautiful lady is hard to find again, people of all times would pity her. Sigh of sorrow!

Previous studies in the field of music and emotion have tended to overlook the role of lyrics in evoking emotional effects, possibly because much earlier research has focused on instrumental classical music. It has been suggested that lyrics may play a greater role in popular music because of the emphasis placed on the musician's role of "speaking" to the audience,⁴⁹⁰ and in the Ming era courtesans' circles also, this role appears to have been pronounced, leading music connoisseurs, literati, and courtesans to attach great importance to the lyrical content of song performances. Thus, in the courtesans' performance arena, both the performers and the listeners appear to have cultivated hyper-sensitivity to the *qing* (or, emotions) in the music itself and in the lyrics. This may also explain why it is so common in Ming literature to portray listeners as being deeply responsive to the emotions conveyed in the courtesans' musical art.

4.9 Summary

A crucial characteristic of the Ming era courtesans' music was its adherence to the ideological emphasis on "sincere emotion", advocated by the contemporary literati. Whether it was a *sanqu* with elegant performance style and highly artistic lyrics, or a popular song with more colloquial and raunchy language, I have found that most of the songs the courtesans sang explored five primary emotions – love, joy, sadness, anxiousness, and anger – in line with the observations of recent music psychology academics.⁴⁹¹ It must be emphasised,

⁴⁹⁰ James Lull, *Popular music and communication* (London: Sage Publications, 1992), 3.

⁴⁹¹ Kreutz, "Short Basic emotions in music." Juslin and Laukka, "Communication of emotions in vocal expression and music performance: Different channels, same code?."

however, that in some cases the feeling of anxiousness is intermingled with melancholy. In addition, songs with satirical and humorous style were particularly popular in brothels and other entertainment contexts. However, these five emotions clearly do not encompass all the sentiments in the Ming courtesans' music. The courtesans also performed dramas working through the full range of emotional states encountered in life, while addressing matters such as family feuds and state affairs. But I focus on the most common theme in courtesan music – love, and the series of emotions that arise in the process of love.

I have categorized courtesans' music according to a progression of the love relationship. From the first meeting, the sweet falling in love, to the bitter separation, reminiscence, and the final resentment, the emotions in the courtesan's music were often simple and relatively unambiguous. In the brothel context, in particular, music expressing basic sentiments may have been more efficient from a practical point of view. This kind of music with strong emotional content could quickly immerse guests in joyful, soothing, melancholy, or nostalgic emotions, helping divert them away from annoying or monotonous daily affairs. However, on many occasions, the lyrics could express mixed emotions with nuance and subtlety.

I have explored the establishment of emotional connections and the subsequent emotional processes involved in the Ming-era courtesans' performance in two perspectives – firstly, in terms of the courtesans' emotional transmission. Identifying the musical preferences of the audience and establishing an empathic relationship with them was one of the key factors for ensuring successful performance. They would then apply their performance skills to express intended emotional content, with the goal of facilitating emotional contagion, whereby the listeners would perceive and respond accordingly. To enhance this process, the courtesan would strive to make the communicated emotion seem as genuine as possible – a skill of emulation that typically requires extensive training.

The second component in the two-way dynamic was the literati-audience, as the people who responded to the courtesans' musical expressions with their own emotions. These people wished to be perceived as emotionally enriched and sensitive to all facets of *qing*, and open to emotional experience. As a result, so-called peak experiences were commonplace in Ming-era literati's written accounts about courtesans' musical performances.

I have also explored two core response mechanisms that are often depicted in the Ming dynasty sources among literati listeners – namely, visual imagery and episodic memory. There are numerous descriptions of listeners experiencing vivid visual imagery related to nature while appreciating the music performed by courtesans and, in some cases, the music is even attributed with supernatural powers. Another emotionally evocative process with great power is episodic memory, where the listeners are induced to experience particular memories and emotions in response to musical details, most commonly lyrics.

In short, then, this chapter has explored the embedding and embodiment of *qing*, a concept highly regarded by the Ming literati, in the music of contemporary courtesans. In the next chapter, I will approach the subject from another standpoint - the soundscape setting – to further explore the manifestation of *qing* and emotions in the courtesans' musical space and in the broader world in which they were situated.

5. Sounds and Sentiments in the Realm of Pleasure

Understanding the associations of sound, emotion, and other meanings in Ming popular literature (novels, lyrics, and drama scripts) is beneficial for delving deeper into the sensory world in which courtesans resided. The Ming dynasty popular literature reveals myriad sounds, most of them bearing symbolic significance and being linked together in a network of meanings. Different sounds often embody multiple emotional associations, and the relationships between sound and sentiment are discussed in these pages. This chapter focuses on the following research questions: What are the various sounds described in Ming period literature that together comprise the soundscape of that sensual world – the wider sonic context within which the courtesans’ utterances, songs and instrumental contributions played their part? What are the various sentiments embodied in those different sounds?

In this chapter, I take the Ming dynasty popular novel *Jin Ping Mei* 金瓶梅 (The Plum in the Golden Vase), written by an anonymous author using the pseudonym Lanling Xiaoxiaosheng 兰陵笑笑生, as a case study. I systematically catalogue the diverse sounds that are alluded to in this key text and analyse their symbolic meanings in the courtesans’ performance space, thereby shedding light on the relationships between sound and sentiment. I have chosen *Jin Ping Mei* as a case study because it is one of the most prominent Ming dynasty vernacular novels of worldly affairs and offers the most extensive and detailed records about courtesans’ lives. It enables us to peek into the otherwise highly private space of the upper middle-class individuals’ residences that were filled with pleasures, affections, and myriad associated sounds.

The research method I employ in this chapter is inspired by Steven Feld’s 2012 book (first ed. 1982) *Sound and Sentiment: Birds, Weeping, Poetics, and Song in Kaluli Expression*. In this book, Feld uses detailed analysis of Kaluli language to reveal the intricate web of associations that link beliefs, customs, animal utterances (particularly the calls of birds), features in nature (such as waterfalls), features of song, and emotions. As he says: “...I began to find a pattern that connected myths, birds, weeping, poetics, song, sadness, death, dance, waterfalls, taboos, sorrow, maleness and femaleness, children, food, sharing, obligation,

performance, and evocation.”⁴⁹² Feld uses the Kaluli myth of the *muni* bird (a kind of fruitdove) to bring together all these strands. This approach of treating myth as a crystallization of a culture’s values is derived from structural anthropology, founded by Claude Levi-Strauss in 1949.⁴⁹³ Here, I am following Feld’s path, applying the approach of structural anthropology to study the sounds and sentiments in the Ming era courtesans’ lives.

I aim to expose and explore in detail the network of symbolically significant sounds presented in *Jin Ping Mei* – encompassing diverse sounds of nature including real and mythical animals, birds and insects, sounds of natural elements (e.g., wind, rain, thunder, storms, and other weather-related natural sounds), and a myriad of human-made sounds, including of course music. This section applies the methods of soundscape study while also acknowledging the limitations of that approach in relation to historical times.

In the first place, it is necessary to define the term “soundscape”. Coined by the Canadian composer and writer R. Murray Schafer in the 1960s, a soundscape refers to the entire sonic environment as perceived by humans in a specific space, usually comprising a large range of sounds, with some more in the perceptual foreground and others in the background.⁴⁹⁴ Since the 1960s, soundscape-related issues have attracted much interest from scholars in various research fields. To list a few relevant studies: R. Murray Schafer’s 1992 article “Music, Non-Music and the Soundscape;” Schafer’s 1993 book *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*; Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso’s 1996 study *Senses of Place*; Veit Erlmann’s 2004 book *Hearing Cultures: Essays on Sound, Listening and Modernity*; Brandon LaBelle’s 2010 study *Acoustic Territories: Sound Culture and Everyday Life*; and David Novak and Matt Sakakeeny’s 2015 research *Keywords in Sound*.

⁴⁹² Steven Feld, *Sound and Sentiment: Birds, Weeping, Poetics, and Song in Kaluli Expression* (Duke University Press, 2012), 14.

⁴⁹³ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Anthropologie Structurale*, vol. 171 (Plon Paris, 1958).

⁴⁹⁴ R. Murray Schafer, *The New Soundscape* (Don Mills, Canada: BMI Canada Limited, 1969). R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993). R. Murray Schafer, *The Book of Noise* (Indian River, Ont.: Arcana Editions, 1998). Steven Feld, "Sound Structure as Social Structure," *Ethnomusicology* (1984). Barry Truax, "Soundscape Studies: An Introduction to the World Soundscape Project," *Numus West* (1974).

It is worth noting that soundscape studies are almost always based on ethnography, enabling the researcher to capture all acoustic elements as they exist in the environment. But, for historical studies of this kind, one has to rely on old texts and visual depictions that do not record the full real soundscape that took place far away in time and space – but instead only offer a partial selective representation of it. Schafer stresses this limitation in his 1993 book.⁴⁹⁵ He states that researchers are at a disadvantage in pursuing a historical perspective and will therefore have to resort to historical records, literature and visual media for clues about soundscapes.⁴⁹⁶ In addition, he recognises that it becomes very difficult to deduce changes over time within a given soundscape when relying on such sources.⁴⁹⁷ Here, then, are the inevitable limitations encountered when applying the soundscape study method in the field of historical ethnomusicology.

Some Ming period sound-related symbols and metaphors have previously been considered by other academics due to the high frequency of their occurrence and symbolic value in Ming era literary work.⁴⁹⁸ For example, the oriole is a common metaphor for the courtesan in late-Ming, and Peng Xu, in particular, shines bright light on its significance. In her dissertation about singing, drama, and aesthetics in late-Ming China (2014), she discusses the bird/courtesan associations – how both sing solo, – at night, alone, without instrumental accompaniment, and in a rather small and thin voice.⁴⁹⁹ She demonstrates that, in the late-Ming, the oriole had become a gendered metaphor for the courtesan's body and her musical art.⁵⁰⁰ This and other studies examine the symbolism of the oriole but they do so without considering the larger network of associated symbolism – most obviously the various other birds which, in people's minds, would have formed a meaningful contrast and complement.⁵⁰¹

⁴⁹⁵ Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*, 8.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁸ Zeitlin, "The Pleasures of Print: Illustrated Songbooks from the Late Ming Courtesan World," 44-51. Xu, "Lost Sound: Singing, Theatre, and Aesthetics in Late Ming China, 1547-1644," 81-83; 117-20.

⁴⁹⁹ Xu, "Lost Sound: Singing, Theatre, and Aesthetics in Late Ming China, 1547-1644," 117-20.

⁵⁰⁰ Xu, "Lost Sound: Singing, Theatre, and Aesthetics in Late Ming China, 1547-1644," 120.

⁵⁰¹ Zeitlin, "The Pleasures of Print: Illustrated Songbooks from the Late Ming Courtesan World." Xu, "Lost

Indeed, I have discovered that such metaphors and episodes only constitute a small fraction of the full range of symbolically significant sounds mentioned in *Jin Ping Mei*.

Crucially, many of the symbolically significant sounds covered in this chapter also frequently appear within the song texts performed by the courtesans. Others do not appear so prevalently in songs but, within the context of *Jin Ping Mei* (and other fiction of the period), they are often encountered. Therefore, it seems highly likely that they too would have been active elements in the spaces they inhabited and in the symbolic understandings of the courtesans and their clients.

5.1 The Birds and Their Calls

I begin unfolding this survey by identifying the various birds mentioned in *Jin Ping Mei* and considering their sounds and the symbolic meanings behind them. Bird vocalization has always been an object of human observation and study, and has often been imbued with rich meaning by the human imagination.⁵⁰² Schafer observes that, in tests, listeners in many countries rate bird-song as one of the most pleasant sounds in their living environment.⁵⁰³ Like all creatures, birds come in all kinds and sizes, and their vocalizations vary widely. In diverse cultural contexts, the different species of bird are endowed with distinct cultural metaphors and meanings according to their physical appearances, sound qualities, habits, and their positions in human mythology and culture.

Take the swan for example. The symbolic connotations that humans attach to swans are derived mainly from their appearances and postures rather than from their limited range of calls, although swans are sometimes represented as musical and melodious.⁵⁰⁴ White swans and black swans embody divergent symbolic meanings. In both eastern and western cultures, white swans are regarded as a symbol of purity, enlightenment, nobility, and virginity due to

Sound: Singing, Theatre, and Aesthetics in Late Ming China, 1547-1644."

⁵⁰² Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*, 29.

⁵⁰³ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁴ Peter Young, *Swan* (London: Reaktion Books, 2008), 43.

their anatomical structure and animal behaviours – the white plumage, the distinctive curve of the neck, their graceful gestures, and long-term pairing behaviour.⁵⁰⁵ Their elegance has naturally become a theme in the creative arts and has been highly praised by artists and poets.⁵⁰⁶ In contrast, black swans have distinct significance, not because of their physical features but because of their intersection with human society. Before the discovery of black swans in Australia by the Europeans in Eighteenth Century, people were convinced that all swans were white out of sheer empiricism.⁵⁰⁷ So, now, the term “black swan” is used to denote highly unpredictable extreme phenomena that are thought to be significant and impactful.⁵⁰⁸ The different symbolic meanings of white and black swans indicate that the cultural associations behind birds are principally determined by human cultures and societies rather than physical objective conditions.

Another example is the crow. On account of their calls and outstanding sonic mimicry abilities, as well as their appearances and habits, they have been attributed with rich symbolic associations by human societies. Firstly, crows are labelled intelligent and cunning because of their remarkable communicative skills. This is well-known in many ancient traditions and stories as well as modern cultures.⁵⁰⁹ According to research, American crows own 23 different calls with dissimilar signals, all of which have been deciphered; there are also dozens of other seemingly meaningful crow calls that have yet to be deciphered.⁵¹⁰ In addition, crows are excellent imitators: they can imitate the calls of other wild animals, and captive crows have even been taught fragments of human language.⁵¹¹ But in many folkloric cultures, the crow’s remarkable skills have also earned it a reputation as a trickster.⁵¹²

⁵⁰⁵ Young, *Swan*, 7.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁷ Nassim Nicholas Taleb, *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable*, vol. 2 (New York: Random House, 2007), xvii.

⁵⁰⁸ Taleb, *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable*, 2, xvi. Terje Aven, "On the Meaning of a Black Swan in a Risk Context," *Safety Science* 57 (2013): 44.

⁵⁰⁹ Boria Sax, *Crow* (London: Reaktion Books, 2003), 17.

⁵¹⁰ Sax, *Crow*, 22.

⁵¹¹ Ibid.

⁵¹² Ibid.

Secondly, crows are also given symbolic meanings for their habits and appearances. They engage in relatively complex social activities, such as cooperative foraging, which is considered a sign of intelligence.⁵¹³ Whereas the crow's eating habits and their black plumage have been deemed ominous and evil-associated in many cultures. In Christianity, crows are considered unclean birds according to their carnivorous, scavenging properties.⁵¹⁴ In the context of Chinese literature also, crows often embody negative sentiments. In the case of *Jin Ping Mei*, the crow (鸦 *ya*) usually represents solitude and desolation, appearing in many poems and song-lyrics. The “cold crow” (寒鸦 *han ya*) is a commonly used phrase, indicating the bird's predominantly negative connotations. Two examples from the novel are: “desiccated trees and cold crows 枯木寒鸦,”⁵¹⁵; and “while, at the same time, the cold crows caw; desolately and disconsolately, right up till dawn 一壁厢寒鸦叫，凄凄凉凉直到晓。”⁵¹⁶

A great array of birds are alluded to in *Jin Ping Mei*, encompassing diverse real species and also a number of mythological birds such as the *feng* 凤 (phoenix) and *luan* 鸾, which often appear together as a celestial pair, symbolising harmony and everlasting love. Reflecting the novel's basis in reality, the most often-mentioned birds are known to have been common species in Southern China, such as warblers, swallows, geese, crows, magpies, cuckoos, and so on.⁵¹⁷ In line with my research focus, in the ensuing analysis, I concentrate especially on the sonic dimension of the birds' symbolism, identifying the various meanings attached to them and, especially, the sentiments they are intimately linked with.

The most frequently mentioned bird in *Jin Ping Mei* is the *ying* 莺 (warbler), which appears 73 times in total. Here, I translate *ying* 莺 as “warbler”, in contrast to David Tod Roy's choice of word “oriole”. This is because, in Chinese contexts, the word oriole usually refers to “*huangli* 黄鹂” rather than “*ying* 莺”. Although the lack of graphic and textual

⁵¹³ Sax, *Crow*, 23.

⁵¹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁵ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume Four: The Climax*, 338. I refer to Roy's translation, but with some changes. The following examples are the same cases.

⁵¹⁶ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume Four: The Climax*, 410.

⁵¹⁷ John Ramsay MacKinnon et al., *A Field Guide to the Birds of China* (Oxford University Press, 2000).

details in the novel makes it impossible to confirm exactly what kind of bird is being referred to, I believe “warbler” is a more appropriate translation as it is an especially common bird in southern China, where the storyline of *Jin Ping Mei* is located. Warbler birds belong to the Sylviidae family. In John Mackinnon and Karen Phillipps’s encyclopaedic work *A Field Guide to the Birds of China* (2002), there are 235 species belonging to Passeriformes Sylviidae, many of which are widely distributed across the focal regions.⁵¹⁸ In terms of physical appearance, the orioles’ body feathers are mostly black and bright golden yellow. Meanwhile, compared with orioles, warblers are smaller in shape – about ten centimetres high). Their bills are shorter, and their plumages are darker in colour, mainly greyish brown.⁵¹⁹ Tables 5.1 and 5.2 (below) illustrate the contrasting visual representations of warblers in ancient and modern sources: Table 5.1 shows contemporary drawings of some common warblers in southern China; Table 5.2 shows a Ming interpretation (painted by Ming court painter Bian Wenjin 边文进) and a contemporary illustration of the Arctic willow warbler, respectively.

		
<p>灰腹地莺 Grey-bellied Tesia. Figure taken from <i>A Field Guide to the Birds of China</i>. Serial number: 0928.</p>	<p>鳞头树莺 Asian Stubtail. Figure taken from <i>A Field Guide to the Birds of China</i>. Serial number: 0929.</p>	<p>远东树莺/短翅树莺 Manchurian Bush Warbler. Figure taken from <i>A Field Guide to the Birds of China</i>. Serial number: 0931.</p>

Table 5.1: Three common warblers in southern China.

⁵¹⁸ MacKinnon et al., *A Field Guide to the Birds of China*.

⁵¹⁹ Ibid.

	
<p>极北柳莺 Arctic Willow Warbler. Excerpted from Bian Wenjing’s <i>Sanyou baiqin tu</i> 三友百禽图 [A Painting of Three Friends and A Hundred Birds], 1413, silk scroll, 152.2 x 78.1cm, Taipei National Palace Museum, Taipei.⁵²⁰</p>	<p>Arctic Willow Warbler. Figure taken from <i>A Field Guide to the Birds of China</i>. Serial number: 0990.</p>

Table 5.2: Arctic willow warblers in a Ming era painting versus in a modern field guide.

Warblers are diverse in species, yet one of their common features is their clear, rhythmical, and melodious calls. This feature is supported both by modern ornithologists and by descriptions in Ming dynasty novels. Take the call of the Manchurian Bush Warbler (see Table 5.1, a warbler commonly found in southern China) as an example. Its call begins with a low trill and ends with a cadenza.⁵²¹ Another example is the Grey-bellied Tesia (Table 5.1). Its song starts with a soft squeak, followed by three fast, high-pitched calls, and ends in a lower tone.⁵²² In *Jin Ping Mei*, the warblers’ utterances are often onomatopoeically represented using “*lili*” 啾啾 and “*gugu*” 咕咕, the repetition of syllables simulating key sonic attributes. Other verbs and adjectives used in connection with the warblers’ calls include *zhuan* 啾 (meaning “twittering”) and *chan* 颤 (meaning “aquiver”).

⁵²⁰ Bian Wenjing, *Sanyou baiqin tu* 三友百禽图 [A painting of three friends and a hundred birds], 1413. silk scroll, 152.2 x 78.1cm. Taipei National Palace Museum. MacKinnon et al., *A Field Guide to the Birds of China*.

⁵²¹ MacKinnon et al., *A Field Guide to the Birds of China*, 931. A video of the call of the Manchurian Bush Warbler can be seen at: Mark Andrews, “Manchurian Bush Warbler (*Horornis canturians*)”, September 27, 2014, 0:42, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kjEmjwd41pI>.

⁵²² MacKinnon et al., *A Field Guide to the Birds of China*, 928. A video of the call of the Grey-bellied Tesia can be seen at: Tuan Nguyen, “Chích Đuôi Cụt Bụng Xám, Grey bellied Tesia”, February 27, 2021, 1:01, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MyLroWNIyVY>.

The *yan* 燕 (swallow) is the other most frequently-mentioned bird in *Jin Ping Mei* and, like the warbler, it is used as either simile or metaphor to denote a beauty who is skilled at song and dance, usually (but not always) redolent with positive sentiments. Related onomatopoeic representations of the swallow's calls include *nannan* 喃喃, *ni-nan* 呢喃, and *jiujiuji* 啾啾唧唧, all translatable as “twittering” or “chirping”. Although it shares the same pronunciation, the *yan* 雁 (goose) represents totally different sentiments – solitude and sadness – and most frequently appears in autumnal scenes. Examples include: “sad cries of frontier geese disturb the breast 塞雁声哀伤怀,”⁵²³ and “a solitary goose calls after its mates, as it crosses the autumn frontier 一雁叫群秋度塞.”⁵²⁴ In contrast, warblers often appear in spring scenes, representing the vitality of spring, liveliness, and life-force. One example is: “amid the flowering crab apples the warblers give voice 海棠枝上绵莺语.”⁵²⁵ The *que* 鹊 (magpie) is similarly associated with joy and good things, while the other *que* 雀 (sparrow) is a symbol of upbeat chattiness. The *yuanyang* 鸳鸯 (mandarin duck) is another bird imbued with positive associations – typically linked to loving couples – yet little attention is paid to their calls in the Ming era accounts. Contrastingly, as alluded to earlier in this chapter, the *ya* 鸦 (crow) invariably denotes a sense of desolation, the fixed formulation “*hanya*” 寒鸦 (cold crows) cementing its negative, bleak image.⁵²⁶ The *dujuan* 杜鹃, *duyu* 杜宇, and *zigui* 子规 (all meaning “cuckoo”) are also tied with negative attributes and emotions, typically linked to someone behaving in a heartless fashion: “the unfeeling cuckoo 杜宇无情.”⁵²⁷

I have catalogued all the birds mentioned in *Jin Ping Mei* below (Table 5.3), together with the sentiments and associations embodied in their images and calls. The number of times they are mentioned in the novel is indicated in the right-hand column.

⁵²³ David Tod Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume Two: The Rivals*, Princeton Library of Asian Translations, (Princeton, New Jersey, and Chichester, West Sussex: Princeton University Press, 2001), 333.

⁵²⁴ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume Three: The Aphrodisiac*, 420.

⁵²⁵ David Tod Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume Five: The Dissolution*, Princeton Library of Asian Translations, (Princeton, New Jersey, and Chichester, West Sussex: Princeton University Press, 2013), 155.

⁵²⁶ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume Four: The Climax*, 338.

⁵²⁷ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume Four: The Climax*, 615.

Bird Name	Sentiments	Associations	Typical Collocation/s	
Ying 莺 (warbler)	Positive (or negative)	A beauty skilled at singing; Courtesans	<i>Qiaqia ying sheng</i> 恰恰莺声 (a continuous warbling sound) <i>liu ying</i> 流莺 (melodious warbling) <i>yan lan ying yong</i> 燕懒莺慵 ("swallows are lazy, warblers are languid", denoting laid-backness)	79
Yan 燕 (swallow)	Positive (or negative)	A beauty skilled at singing	<i>Yanyu nannan</i> 燕语喃喃 (the twittering of swallows)	51
Yan 雁, hong 鸿 (goose, or wild goose)	Sadness, gloom, loneliness	N/A	<i>Hanyan</i> 寒雁 (cold geese) <i>Guyan</i> 孤雁 (solitary geese) <i>Guhong</i> 孤鸿 (solitary geese)	51
He 鹤 (crane)	No obvious sentiments	Immortality; longevity; nobility; purity	<i>Yin liangxiu qingfeng wuhe</i> 引两袖清风舞鹤 ("Carrying a breeze in my sleeves and dancing cranes")	38
Yuanyang 鸳鸯 (mandarin)	Positive	Loving couples	N/A	31
Ya 鸦 (raven, crow)	Desolation	N/A	<i>Hanya</i> 寒鸦 (cold crows)	29
Kongque 孔雀 (peacock)	No obvious sentiment	Luxuriousness	<i>Pingkai kongque</i> 屏开孔雀 ("a peacock motif unfolding on a screen," describing luxurious décor)	14
Que 鹊 (magpie)	A sign of joy; good things	N/A	<i>Xique</i> 喜鹊 (auspicious magpies)	8
Dujuan 杜鹃, duyu 杜宇, zigui 子规 (cuckoo)	Negative. Heartlessness; loss	N/A	<i>Duyu wuqing</i> 杜宇无情 (heartless cuckoos)	7
Que 雀, maque 麻雀 (sparrow)	No obvious sentiment	Chattiness	N/A	7
Ji 鸡 (cock)	No obvious sentiment	A sign for dawn	<i>Jijiao shifen</i> 鸡叫时分 (the crack of dawn)	2
Zhegu 鹧鸪 (partridge)	No obvious sentiment	N/A	<i>Zhegu youyi</i> 鹧鸪有意 (willing partridges)	1

Table 5.3: Birds and their sentiments and associations in *Jin Ping Mei*.

As shown in Table 5.3 (above), warblers and swallows appear most frequently in the novel, both closely associated with beauties, courtesans, and singing girls. The following sections explore these associations in more detail.

5.1.1 Birds' Calls as Beauties' Voices

In *Jin Ping Mei*, warblers 莺 and swallows 燕 are most commonly mentioned to characterise the speaking or singing voice of a beauty (usually a courtesan skilled at singing). These metaphors are often used in love-making scenes and in the courtesans' performance scenes.

Long before the Ming dynasty, it had been common to compare a beauty's voice to the chirpings of these birds – especially in reference to descriptions about courtesans and concubines.⁵²⁸ For instance, the four-character idioms *yingying yanyan* 莺莺燕燕 (warblers and swallows) and *ying ge yan wu* 莺歌燕舞 (warblers singing and swallows dancing) are well-known fixed collocations in this connection. The former describes spring in full bloom, or a gathering of concubines or courtesans; the latter is a metaphor for the exuberance of spring, or a way to describe the graceful singing and dancing of beauties. In Chinese contexts, warblers and swallows are often mentioned together, serving as a joint metaphor for beautiful ladies. In relation to courtesans specifically, beauty is defined not only by natural physical attributes but also by musical (especially singing) and dancing abilities. This is emphasised by the Ming dramatist Li Yu 李渔 (1611-1680) in his monograph on Ming era life-styles and aesthetics, *Xian Qing Ou Ji* 闲情偶寄 (Sketches of Idle Pleasures). Here, Li Yu states that the cultivation of vocal skills is essential if a woman's voice is to take on “the grace of swallows' chirps and warblers' sounds”:

⁵²⁸ Joseph S.C. Lam et al., *Senses of the City: Perceptions of Hangzhou and Southern Song China, 1127–1279* (The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2017), 15.

欲其声音婉转，则必使之学歌；学歌既成，则随口发声，皆有燕语莺啼之致，不必歌而歌在其中矣。⁵²⁹

To make her voice melodious and sweet, she must be taught to sing. Once she has mastered singing, every sound she makes will be imbued with the grace of swallows' chirps and warblers' sounds, and she will embody the essence of song even without singing.

It should be noted that, although both warblers and swallows are sometimes used to refer to a woman's voice, the swallow is actually more commonly linked with a woman's light, dexterous dancing movements. In contrast, the warbler is more commonly associated with sweet-toned vocal sonority – naturally, owing to its more mellifluous sonic qualities. In *Jin Ping Mei*, these birds are used metaphorically in two types of scenes, especially. One is love-making scenes, in which the warbler appears fourteen times in total and the swallow nine times.⁵³⁰ The other is performance scenes focusing on women (mostly courtesans) singing, where the warbler appears five times. Swallows, on the contrary, do not appear in the latter scenes.

5.1.1.1 Warblers' calls as metaphors for women's voices

Looking beyond *Jin Ping Mei*, we find that the warbler's cry is used extensively in Ming period writing as a metaphor for the sound of a woman's melodious voice. An apt example is provided in the erotic novel *Rou Pu Tuan* 肉蒲团 (The Carnal Prayer Mat): "At her side one hears exquisite tones, like the warbling of innumerable orioles (warblers). 从旁听妙语，不数莺簧。"⁵³¹

⁵²⁹ Li Yu, *Xian qing ou ji* 闲情偶寄 [Sketches of idle pleasures] [1671], vol. 1, 357.

⁵³⁰ Since warblers and swallows are often paired in such scenes, the counts here are inevitably somewhat repetitive.

⁵³¹ Li Yu, *The Carnal Prayer Mat*, trans. Patrick Hanan (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1996), 171.

Within *Jin Ping Mei*, we sometimes encounter the bird's warbling sounds being used to describe the whispered, soft, subtle talking sounds between lovers. A typical example comes from Chapter 98, when the courtesan Han Aijie retains Chen Jingji to rest in her chamber, and they spend the night talking and making love:

当下枕畔山盟，衾中海誓，莺声燕语，曲尽绸缪，不能悉记。

On this occasion, what with:

Oaths by the pillowside to be faithful as the hills,

Promises under the quilts to be as true as the seas;

Giving forth warbler's notes and swallow's cries,

They enjoyed to the full their mutual affection;

But it is impossible to evoke all that they did.⁵³² [David Roy translation]

The first linking of a warbler's cries to a woman's moans appears in Chapter Four, when Pan Jinlian makes love for the first time with the male protagonist Ximen Qing:

恰恰莺声，不离耳畔；津津甜唾，笑吐舌尖。

The pleasing cries of the warbler,

Are never absent from his ears;

Forever moist with sweet spittle,

She smiles as she sticks out her tongue.⁵³³ [David Roy translation]

The second example is the episode in which Pan Jinlian has an adulterous affair with a servant boy. In this scene, the author cleverly juxtaposes the snoring sound of the cow, which is actually the servant's gasp, with the melodious sound of the warble – Jinlian's moan, to add humour between the lines:

⁵³² Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume Five: The Dissolution*, 363.

⁵³³ In the following quotes, I replace the word "oriole" used in Roy's translation with the more appropriate "warbler". Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume One: The Gathering*, 85.

一个气暗眼瞪，好似牛吼柳影；一个言娇语涩，浑如莺啭花间。

One of them, breathing heavily with staring eyes,
Sounds like an ox snoring in the willow's shade;
The other, with coy words and inarticulate cries,
Reminds one of a warbler warbling among the flowers.⁵³⁴ [David Roy translation]

As mentioned earlier, there are many episodes in *Jin Ping Mei* where warblers and swallows appear together. One of the most common collocations is *ying sheng yan yu* 莺声燕语, meaning “warbler's notes and swallow's cries,” or “the billing swallows and cooing orioles.”⁵³⁵ The following are a few examples of fixed collocations, using the cries of warblers and swallows as metaphors for female voices in lovemaking episodes:

这一个莺声啾啾，那一个燕语喃喃。

This one gives vent to the warbling of a warbler,
That one gives voice to the twittering of a swallow.⁵³⁶

.....

(妇人) 口中燕语莺声，百般难述。

The swallow's cries and warbler's notes, that issued from her mouth:
Were too multifarious to describe in detail.⁵³⁷

.....

一个施展他久战熬场法，一个卖弄他莺声燕语谐。

One of them flaunts his ability to maintain
even a prolonged conflict;
The other her skill at giving forth warbler's
notes and swallow's cries.⁵³⁸ [David Roy translation]

⁵³⁴ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume One: The Gathering*, 233.

⁵³⁵ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume Two: The Rivals*, 189. Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume Three: The Aphrodisiac*, 287.

⁵³⁶ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume One: The Gathering*, 266.

⁵³⁷ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume Two: The Rivals*, 189.

⁵³⁸ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume Four: The Climax*, 595.

5.1.1.2 *Warblers' calls as metaphors for melodious singing*

There are four instances in *Jin Ping Mei* where the warblers' calls are explicitly linked to women's singing voices. One of the most representative is in Chapter Eleven. Here, the male protagonist, Ximen Qing, visits his friend Hua Zixu's house to drink and enjoy a musical performance by three courtesans:

一个粉头，两个妓女，琵琶箏阮，在席前弹唱。...

「罗衣迭雪，宝髻堆云。樱桃口，杏脸桃腮，杨柳腰，兰心蕙性。歌喉宛啭，声如枝上流莺；舞态踈跂，影似花间凤转。...歌遏行云遮楚馆。高低紧慢按宫商，吐玉喷珠。轻重疾徐依格调，铿金戛玉。箏排雁柱声声慢，板排红牙字字新。」

A performer with a painted face and two other singing girls were there to entertain them, playing a *pipa*, a psaltery, and a mandola, and singing in front of the gathering...

Their silk garments are like drifts of snow;

Their jewelled chignons are like storeyed clouds.

They have cherry mouths, apricot-like faces,
and peach-coloured cheeks;

They possess willow waists, orchidaceous hearts,
and epidendron-like natures.

The sound of their singing is melodious;

Their voices are like the warbling of warblers
as they sport upon the branch.

The style of their dancing is fastidious;

Their postures resemble the pacing of phoenixes
as they move among the flowers.

...

Their singing diverts the moving clouds
into hovering atop the bordellos of Chu.

High or low, allegro or andante,
they adhere to the appropriate modes;

Spitting out jade and expectorating pearls.
Light or heavy, scherzando or legato,
they follow the prescribed melodies;
Like plangent metal or tinkling jade.
The bridges on the psaltery are ranged like wild geese;
making each note distinct.
The wood of the clappers is inlaid with red ivory;
so every beat sounds new.⁵³⁹ [David Roy translation]

This passage employs richly detailed description, replete with extensive similes and metaphors, to highlight the lavishness of a banquet, while also indicating the urban literati's ideals for courtesans at that time – pinpointing their remarkable appearances and skills at singing and instrumental playing. To emphasize the courtesans' euphonic singing voices, the author makes an analogy with the warblers' call: "Their voices are like the warbling of warblers, as they sport upon the branch." This complements the author's other descriptions relating to their physical appearances, gestures, movements, and music: silk garments like snow, jewelled chignons like storeyed clouds, cherry mouths, apricot-faces, willow waists, orchidaceous hearts, epidendron-like natures, postures like the pacing of phoenixes, and singing like "spitting out jade and expectorating pearls". In this way, the author is implying that the courtesans embody a myriad of wondrous qualities (observable in the most striking of natural phenomena), in their appealing looks, excellent temperaments, and superb musical skills.

Here, I argue that there are two reasons behind this use of rhetoric. Firstly, the author is piling up metaphors as a literary device, amassing beautiful words and images to accentuate the superlative qualities of the moment. Secondly, the author is emphasising a particular understanding regarding the nature of great art – namely, that it forges connections between disparate phenomena (spread across human affairs, the natural world, the elements and more), promoting a realisation of interconnectedness. From the author's description, one can see that

⁵³⁹ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume One: The Gathering*, 216-17.

this particular musical performance is a great success – highly artistically refined, and rich in visual and auditory stimulation. In such a wonderful performance space, the audience’s sensory perceptions (smell, sight, hearing) are collectively activated to yield strong emotional impacts.

The following are four further examples comparing female singing voices to warblers’ calls:

歌喉宛啭，声如枝上流莺。

The sound of their singing is melodious;
Their voices are like the warbling of warblers
as they sport upon the branch.⁵⁴⁰

.....

娇声儿似啭日流莺。

Her captivating voice is like that of a
warbler singing in the sun.⁵⁴¹

.....

一个娇声啾啾，犹似莺啭花间

The other, as her coy cries reverberate,
Resembles a warbler warbling among the flowers.⁵⁴²

.....

数声娇语如莺啭，一串珍珠落线头！

The sounds of a few amorous words are like warbling warblers;
Tears drop like a strand of pearls falling off their string.⁵⁴³ [David Roy translation]

In all four cases, the term *zhuan* 啭 (trilling, twittering, chirping; bird singing) – translated simply as “warbling”, or “singing” in Roy’s translation – is used to portray certain admirable qualities within the female entertainers’ singing voices. Obviously, the primary

⁵⁴⁰ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume One: The Gathering*, 216-17.

⁵⁴¹ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume Four: The Climax*, 621.

⁵⁴² Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume Five: The Dissolution*, 49.

⁵⁴³ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume Five: The Dissolution*, 266.

reason for comparing the women's singing to that of the warbler is a desire to highlight shared properties, such as melodiousness, clarity of timbre, naturalness, and virtuosity.

5.1.2 Birds in Song Texts

Bird imagery also appears in the poetry-style song texts, which are scattered throughout to underline focal emotions, be they positive or negative. Usually presented at the beginnings or ends of chapters, or in episodes related to song performance, a large proportion of these song texts are explicitly indicated as being sung by courtesans. Again, warblers and their calls are particularly prevalent, as addressed in the following sections.

5.1.2.1 *Negative emotions*

There are a total of five song texts in the novel in which a warbler is associated with negative emotions. One of these is situated during a family banquet, when the entertainer Sister Shen demonstrates her extraordinary singing skills by performing a typical courtesan song accompanied by a *zheng*:

花零乱，柳成阴，蝶因蜂迷莺倦吟。方才眼睁，心儿里忘了。
想啾啾唧唧呢喃燕，重将旧恨，旧恨又题醒，扑簌簌泪珠儿暗倾。

The blossoms lie scattered,
The willows are umbrageous,
The butterflies are jaded, the bees bemused,
and the warblers tired of singing.
On first waking up,
I had forgotten my longing,
But the relentless twittering
of the swallows,
Has stirred up my old resentment,

And only served to reawaken it.
In an endless pitter-patter,
My teardrops silently cascade.⁵⁴⁴ [David Roy translation]

There are six primary symbolic elements in this example: blossoms, willows, butterflies, bees, warblers, and swallows. These nature symbols are particularly abundant in song texts about courtesans' singing, perhaps serving to emphasise qualities of naturalness and effortlessness in the artistry and within the scenario more generally – a drinking party with an emphasis on hedonism. However, here, the associated adjectives all contain a tinge of melancholy: “scattered”, “umbrageous”, “jaded”, “bemused”, “tired”. Meanwhile, the warblers are described as “tired of singing” and the swallows as “relentless” in their twittering.

The following second example also takes place during a private banquet, although here the audience is dominated by the ladies in the Ximen family. As an independent blind singer, Sister Yü provides paid performances to rich families represented by the Ximen Mansion and, in this scene, she sings at a drinking banquet to entertain the wives and concubines:

呀！空闲了鸳鸯锦被，寂寞了燕约莺期。
“Ah! I found myself all alone beneath my
mandarin duck brocade quilt;
Deserted for my swallows' tryst, swallows'
tryst or warblers' assignation.⁵⁴⁵ [David Roy translation]

Here, the image of a pair of mandarin ducks on the brocade is contrasted with the solitary swallows and warblers in the second half of the lyrics, reflecting the feelings of loneliness and desertion of women in their boudoirs.

Such usage of warbler metaphors to set off emotions also appears in other Ming era literary works. One example is from the play *Mu Dan Ting* 牡丹亭 (The Peony Pavilion).⁵⁴⁶

⁵⁴⁴ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume Four: The Climax*, 18.

⁵⁴⁵ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume Four: The Climax*, 411.

⁵⁴⁶ A romantic tragicomedy play written by Ming-era dramatist Tang Xianzu in 1598. Xianzu Tang, *The Peony*

(旦) 遍青山啼红了杜鹃，荼靡外烟丝醉软。春香啊，牡丹虽好，他春归怎占的先！(贴)成对儿莺燕啊。(合)闲凝眄，生生燕语明如翦，啁啾莺歌溜的圆。

Bridal (the female protagonist Li-niang):

The green hillside
bleeds with the cuckoo's tears of red azalea,
shreds of mist lazy as wine fumes thread the sweetbriar.
However fine the peony,
how can she rank as queen
coming to bloom when spring has said farewell!

Fragrance (the maid): See them pairing, orioles and swallows!

Bridal, Fragrance:

Idle gaze resting
there where the voice of swallow shears the air
and liquid flows the trill of orioles.

In this episode, the heroine Li-niang expresses her longing for her beloved through detailing her feelings about the spring scenery, featuring the metaphor of the oriole (warbler) and the swallow as a loving couple.

Another similar example appears in the Ming dynasty fiction *Chuke Pai'an Chuanqi* 初刻拍案惊奇 (Slapping the Table in Amazement).⁵⁴⁷ In the following *ci* poem, the fine spring scenery (blossoming flowers and birdsong) is used to set off the lonesome mood of the protagonist, and the oriole (warbler) in the scene is a metaphor for his lover:

.....韶光艳、碧天新霁。正桃腮半吐，莺声初试。孤枕乍闻弦索悄，曲屏时听
笙簧细。

Pavilion: Mudan Ting, trans. Cyril Birch, Chinese Literature in Translation, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), 45.

⁵⁴⁷ *Chuke Pai'an Chuanqi* 初刻拍案惊奇 (Slapping the Table in Amazement) is a collection of vernacular short stories, written by the Ming scholar Ling Mengchu (1580–1644).

The sweet sunlight of spring clears the sky of rain;
The peach blossoms half open, the oriole tries out its voice.
By my lonely pillow, the notes burst on my ears;
By my folding screen, I hear the trebles.⁵⁴⁸
[Shuhui Yang and Yunqin Yang translation]

5.1.2.2 Positive emotions

In *Jin Ping Mei*, there are five song texts relating warblers to positive emotions. The first example occurs in a pleasure quarter, when four singing girls perform songs while serving drinks for Ximen Qing and his companions. The lead singer is the courtesan Han Xiaochou. After Ximen Qing has asked her to sing a set of songs starting with the words “on first seeing that bashful beauty”, Han Xiaochou “takes up her *pipa*”. The author then explains: “she gently displayed her coquettish voice, doing her best to show off her talent.”⁵⁴⁹ Evidently, this courtesan has recognised that emphasising coquettishness is a wise strategy at this moment, fitting the repertoire, the mood, and her client’s tastes. When she performs the fourth piece, the images of swallow and warbler appear, again in pairs:

（韩消愁）又唱第四个：「春暖芙蓉，鬓乱钗横宝髻松。我为他香娇玉软，燕侣莺俦，意美情浓。腰肢无力眼蒙胧，深情自把眉儿纵。两意相同，相同！百年恩爱，和谐鸾凤。」

More wine was poured, after which Han Xiaochou continued by singing the fourth song:

In the spring warmth under the hibiscus curtains,

⁵⁴⁸ Ling Mengchu, *Slapping the Table in Amazement: A Ming Dynasty Story Collection*, trans. Shuhui Yang and Yunqin Yang (University of Washington Press, 2018), 185-86. The original verse for the last sentence conveys more nuanced meanings than merely “trebles”. A more comprehensive translation would be: “Over the folding screen, I hear a reedy sound, like that of the *sheng* (mouth organ).” This likens the woman’s voice to both the warbler’s song and the *sheng*’s distinctive sonority.

⁵⁴⁹ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume Four: The Climax*, 234.

My coiffure is in disarray, my hairpins askew,
 and my chignon dishevelled.
 All on his account, my fragrance is alluring,
 and my jade is soft;
 As we emulate billing swallows and cooing warblers,
 Our feelings are ardent, our passions are intense.
 My waist has become languorous,
 and my eyes are bleary,
 But in the depths of our passion
 my eyebrows are wanton.
 The two of us share an affinity,
 An affinity;
 Desirous of enjoying a lifetime of love,
 in harmony like phoenix mates.⁵⁵⁰ [David Roy translation]

In these lyrics, which express passionate love from the perspective of a female (in this context, a courtesan), the second line draws direct links to the sounds of swallows and warblers. Here, David Roy expertly translates the phrase *yan lǚ ying tao* 燕侶鶯俦 into “we emulate billing swallows and cooing warblers” to capture the sonic details. These lyrics reveal the courtesan’s ability to master emotions and moods, as she skilfully martials everything at her disposal to powerful effect: hair accessories, scents, appealing voices, gestures, movements, and facial expressions.

The second example also happens at a private banquet. While the clients drink tea and wait for the banquet to begin, two singing boys start performing a song suite and play plucked instruments (most likely *pipa*) to entertain the guests:

银箏秋雁横，玉管莺弄。花明翡翠翹，酒满玻璃寺。衫袖捧金尊，罗帕春葱。
 橙嫩霜剖，茶香带雪烹。欢浓，醉后情从重。筵终，更深乐未穷。

⁵⁵⁰ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume Four: The Climax*, 236.

On the silver psaltery the bridges are ranged like wild geese;
 The sound of the jade flute is like the warble of a baby oriole (warbler).
 The flowers are as brightly coloured as a kingfisher's wings;
 A plenitude of wine fills to the brim the vitreous decanter.
 Variegated sleeves proffer golden goblets;
 Slender fingers handle silk handkerchiefs.
 The frosty rinds of fresh oranges are peeled;
 Melted snow is used to boil the fragrant tea.
 Pleasure abounds,
 Inebriated feelings are profoundly stimulated.
 The feast is over,
 The night is late but desire is not yet sated.⁵⁵¹ [David Roy translation]

In this song text, which portrays yet another sumptuous banquet, interestingly, the first two sentences reference three different birds: wild geese, warblers, and kingfishers. The first sentence artfully brings together metaphors of wild geese and warblers to describe the musical instruments used at the banquet, comparing the bridges on the silver psaltery to the formation of wild geese in flight, and the sounds of the jade flute to the cries of baby warblers. As argued earlier in this chapter, this literary device of piling up metaphors and amassing beautiful words and images works well to stress the superlative qualities of the moment, while indicating that a major transcendental objective is being met: specifically, intimate links are forged across disparate areas of the phenomenal world.

5.2 Other Sounds of Nature

In addition to bird calls, *Jin Ping Mei* makes reference to various other nature sounds for their symbolic associations. These include insect sounds, animal sounds, and weather-related sounds. For instance, the sound of *chan* 蝉 (cicadas) is often used to set off the summer heat:

⁵⁵¹ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume Four: The Climax*, 366.

槐阴满地日卓午，时听新蝉噪一声。

Shadows of locust trees cover the ground;
It is just high noon;
From time to time one hears the stridulation
of new-fledged cicadas.⁵⁵² [David Roy translation]

Other insects are mentioned as well. For example, the “chirring” of crickets (蟋蟀 *xishuai*) is typically associated with negative sentiments. In the following example, it combines with the cries of wild geese, augmenting a sense of sorrowful emotion:

.....雁声嘹，孤眠才子梦魂惊；
蛩韵凄凉，独宿佳人情绪苦。

The cries of the wild geese resonate,
Disturbing the dreams of men of talent
who sleep alone.
The chirring of crickets is desolate,
Embittering the feelings of beauties
in solitary slumber.⁵⁵³ [David Roy translation]

Various animals are also mentioned for their symbolic meanings. For example, at one point, dogs (狗 *gou*) are associated with desolation: “Travelers head for desolate villages; where, among the lanes, they arouse the barking of dogs. 客奔荒村，闾巷内汪汪犬吠。”⁵⁵⁴ As a less commonly articulated symbol, the sound of a crab crawling is used as a metaphor for the sound of sex: “The sound they made was just like: crabs scuttling in the mud; the noise was incessant. 其声如泥中螃蟹一般，响之不绝。”⁵⁵⁵ Other animal sounds are associated with the weather. For instance, 龙吟虎啸 *long yin hu xiao* (literally, “roaring of tigers and

⁵⁵² Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume Two: The Rivals*, 186.

⁵⁵³ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume Three: The Aphrodisiac*, 474.

⁵⁵⁴ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume One: The Gathering*, 161.

⁵⁵⁵ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume Two: The Rivals*, 189.

droning of dragons”) is a fixed phrase employed for describing a violent windstorm⁵⁵⁶ – although I prefer the translation of *yin* 吟 as “growling”, rather than “droning”.

Jin Ping Mei also features a great many evocative descriptions of the weather – typically also highlighting its sonic attributes – primarily for their symbolic potency. Indeed, the weather descriptions typically serve one of three purposes: providing insights into a protagonist’s inner state; describing qualities within musical performance, as well as the music’s powerful impacts; or highlighting aspects of the lovemaking experience. I will presently explore each of these in turn.

Firstly, there are many episodes in *Jin Ping Mei* where the weather reflects inner emotions. Snowy and rainy weather are typically associated with negative emotions, as are the sounds of windchimes. A representative example comes from Chapter 38, when Pan Jinlian waits for her lover on a snowy night while playing the *pipa*:

猛听的房檐上铁马儿一片声响，只道西门庆来到敲的门环儿响，连忙使春梅去瞧。他回头：「娘错了。是外边风起落雪了。」妇人于是弹唱道：「听风声嘹，雪洒窗寮，任水花片片飘。」

Suddenly she heard the wind chimes on the eaves of her room:

Make a peal of sound.

Thinking it was Hsi-men Ch’ing who had come and was making the racket with the door knocker, she hastily sent Ch’un-mei out to take a look. But she reported, “Mother, you’re mistaken. The wind has come up outside and it’s started to snow.”

The woman then continued to accompany herself as she sang:

I hear the roaring of the wind,

I see the snow blowing against the casement.

Let the frozen flakes flutter!⁵⁵⁷ [David Roy translation]

Here, the sounds of roaring wind, blowing snow, and peals of wind chimes are outward representations of Jinlian’s inward feelings, and it is notable that she then articulates those

⁵⁵⁶ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P’ing Mei, Volume Four: The Climax*, 338.

⁵⁵⁷ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P’ing Mei, Volume Two: The Rivals*, 395.

feelings through the lyrics of her song. The following two extracts employ the exact same symbolic tropes, similarly to convey sentiments of loneliness and desolation:

扑扑簌簌雪儿下，风吹檐马，把奴梦魂惊。叮叮当当，搅碎了奴心。

In an endless pitter-patter, the snowflakes
begin to fall.
The windblown chimes under the eaves,
Intrude upon my dreaming soul;
Their ding-ding dong-dong,
Shatter my peace of mind.⁵⁵⁸ [David Roy translation]

.....

画檐前叮当铁马，敲碎仕女情怀。

Before painted eaves, the ding-donging
of the wind chimes,
Causes wellborn young ladies to
break their hearts...⁵⁵⁹ [David Roy translation]

In contrast, the following example from Chapter 27 makes links between the weather and positive emotions. Here, Ximen Qing and his concubines are drinking and enjoying music in the garden, when a rainstorm suddenly occurs. After the storm, the beautiful scenery is set off by their singing voices:

少顷雨止，天外残虹，西边透出日色来。得多少微雨过碧砚之润，晚风凉院落之清。.....于是取过月琴来，教玉楼弹著。西门庆排手，众人齐唱梁州序：
「向晚来，雨过南轩，见池面红妆凌乱。听春雷隐隐，雨收云散。...

Before long the rain stopped, the remnant of a rainbow hung suspended in the distant sky, and a glimpse of the sun reappeared in the west. Truly, it is a case of:
The passing of a fine rain imparts a sheen to the azure promontory;

⁵⁵⁸ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume Four: The Climax*, 21.

⁵⁵⁹ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume Three: The Aphrodisiac*, 474.

The cooling of an evening breeze enhances the purity of the courtyard...
Thereupon, he picked up the moon guitar and gave it to Yu-lou to play while he
clapped his hands in accompaniment as they all sang together, to the tune “Liang-chou
Prelude”:

As evening falls, rain passes over the southern pavilion,
Disordering the rouged surface of the pond.
Spring thunder rumbles indistinctly;
The rain is over and the clouds disperse.⁵⁶⁰ [David Roy translation]

Secondly, weather-related symbols are often used in a hyperbolic fashion to emphasise
the immense impact exerted by a particular performance. For example, in Chapter eleven, a
performance by a group of courtesans is described as follows:

舞回明月坠秦楼，歌遏行云遮楚馆。

Their dancing waylays the bright moon
into shining on the pleasure-houses of Ch'in;
Their singing diverts the moving clouds
into hovering atop the bordellos of Ch'u.⁵⁶¹ [David Roy translation]

This description suggests that their dancing had the power to attract moonlight and their
voices were able to “divert moving clouds”. In short, their artistic skills are so finely honed
that they have acquired supernatural influence. Another example is used to describe a
courtesan’s sonorous singing voice:⁵⁶²

唱出一句来，端的有落尘绕梁之声，裂石流云之响。把官哥儿諕的在桂姐怀
里，只磕倒著，再不敢抬头出气儿。

The very first line that they sang, truly possessed:
A timbre that causes dust to fall and lingers around the rafters:
A sound that causes rocks to split and sets the clouds in motion.

⁵⁶⁰ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume Two: The Rivals*, 138.

⁵⁶¹ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume One: The Gathering*, 217.

⁵⁶² Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume Three: The Aphrodisiac*, 52.

Kuan-ko (the child) was so frightened by the noise that he hid his face in Li Kuei-chieh's bosom:

Not daring to raise his head, or take another breath. [David Roy translation]

The voice in this example is portrayed as sharing certain properties with the natural elements: beyond exerting a profound impact on a little child, like wind and thunder, it can make dust fly, rocks crack, and clouds move.

Thirdly, weather is often used metaphorically in reference to sex and other intimate behaviour. *Yunyu* 云雨 (clouds and rain) has long been a commonly-used metaphor for love-making and intimacy in Chinese contexts, ever since the Warring States Period (around 481 BC to 403 BC).⁵⁶³ In *Jin Ping Mei*, the term *yunyu* appears a total of 38 times, and one of those is in Chapter 80:⁵⁶⁴

耳边诉雨意云情，枕上说山盟海誓。

Into each other's ears they pour the passions
evoked by clouds and rain;
On their pillows they swear to be as faithful
as the hills and seas. [David Roy translation]

Although the above-mentioned nature-related sounds are not directly associated with courtesans and their music, nevertheless, they are significant elements in *Jin Ping Mei's* soundscape world, working alongside the other sounds within a complex symbolic network to shed light on the characters' inner worlds. The table below (Table 5.4) lists them, summarises their essential significance, and indicates how many times they are mentioned.

⁵⁶³ The earliest use of this metaphor comes from Song Yu's 宋玉 *Preface to the Gaotang* 高唐赋, which was written during the Warring States Period. “旦为朝云，暮为行雨。In the morning she transforms into a cloud, and in the twilight into rain.” This line describes an intimate rendezvous between two lovers. See: Cao Wenxin, *Song Yu ci fu* 宋玉辞赋 [Essays by Song Yu] (Hefei: Anhui University Press, 2006), 135.

⁵⁶⁴ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume Four: The Climax*, 673.

Symbols of Nature	Emotions, Metaphors, and Meanings	Mentions
<i>Yunyu</i> 云雨 (clouds and rain)	Lovemaking; intimacy	38
<i>Xishuai</i> 蟋蟀, <i>qiong</i> 蛩 (crickets)	Negative emotion. Sorrow; desolation	6
<i>Chan</i> 蝉 (cicadas)	Hotness in summer	2
<i>Long yin hu xiao</i> 龙吟虎啸 (roaring of tigers and droning of dragons)	Metaphors for a windstorm	2
<i>Quan</i> 犬 (dog)	Negative emotion. Desolation	1
<i>Pangxie</i> 螃蟹 (crabs)	Lovemaking sounds	1

Table 5.4: Other nature sound-symbols in *Jin Ping Mei*.

Before continuing to the final section of this chapter, it is worth highlighting that, within *Jin Ping Mei*'s narrative, these various nature-related sound symbols very commonly appear alongside human-made sounds, reflecting the reality that, at that time, the boundaries between the natural/wild and human/civilized realms were more blurred than they are today. The novel's richly descriptive passages allude to a wide range of human utterances and work-related sounds – just one example being “The dinning sound of pounding laundry bats resounds in my ears 听叮当砧声满耳”⁵⁶⁵ – and these are often shown to cohabit the soundscape alongside bird song and other elements. The following example amply illustrates this, coming from an episode where a tavern is described (which also functions as a pleasure quarter). Here, significantly, the tavern is shown to be situated close to nature: “it backed on a hill, overlooked the Grand Canal”.⁵⁶⁶

⁵⁶⁵ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume Three: The Aphrodisiac*, 184. This is a lyric to the tone “The Tiger Descends the Mountain”.

⁵⁶⁶ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume Five: The Dissolution*, 265.

雕檐映日，画栋飞云。绿栏杆低接轩窗，翠帘栊高悬户牖。吹笙品笛，尽都是公子王孙；执盏擎杯，摆列著歌姬舞女。……白苹渡口，时闻渔父鸣榔；红蓼滩头，每见钓翁击楫。楼畔绿杨啼野鸟，门前翠柳系花骢。

Sculpted eaves reflect the sunlight;
Painted rafters fly into the clouds.
Green balustrades connect beneath
the balcony windows;
Kingfisher blinds are rolled high
above the casements.
Those blowing pipes and playing flutes,
are all noble scions or royal princelings;
Those holding cups and raising beakers,
are bands of courtesans and dancing girls.
.....
By the white duckweed crossing,
one hears trawlers sounding their clappers;
By the red smartweed beachhead,
one hears fishermen beating their bulwarks.
By the tavern side, on the verdant willows,
the wild birds are crowing;
Before the gate, amidst the green poplars,
piebald steeds are tethered.⁵⁶⁷ [David Roy translation]

This paragraph vividly depicts the close proximity of luxurious pleasure, gritty human labour, and wild nature in this remarkable place – a proximity that is also registered in the soundscape, where we simultaneously perceive the sounds of the courtesans’ pipes and flutes, the trawlers’ clappers, the fishermen’s bulwark-beating, and “wild birds... crowing”.

⁵⁶⁷ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume Five: The Dissolution*, 265.

Meanwhile, the stark contrasts characterising this soundscape serve to highlight the extravagance of the lifestyles being pursued inside the tavern – customers drinking and courtesans performing (while the labourers work hard just outside). Such detailed sound descriptions provide the readers with a vivid understanding of the pleasure quarters’ significance within broader Ming society.

5.3 The Sonic Surroundings in the Performance Arena

Having examined the various sounds of nature alluded to in *Jin Ping Mei* for their symbolic significance, this final part of the chapter will now turn to consider the human-made sounds that are reported to have characterised the courtesans’ performance arena. Here too, the focus remains on *Jin Ping Mei*’s representations of soundscape and symbolism.

Within the context of the novel, the typical performance arena is, specifically, the private drinking party, and there are a great many descriptions of drinking party performances scattered throughout, generally portraying busy sonic environments comprising diverse sonic elements: the sounds of instruments and, of course, singing; sounds of talking and laughing; sounds of eating and drinking; sounds made by clothing and ornaments; the sounds made while playing games; and extraneous sounds entering from beyond the party’s confines. Together, these sounds characterised the acoustic environment of the courtesans’ performance arena and played a major role in shaping the prevailing mood.⁵⁶⁸

Appearing alongside the focal sounds of musical performance (addressed elsewhere in this chapter and also in other chapters), the party soundscapes are typically described as being richly infused with the sounds of conversation and laughter. For example, in the following brief example, the ambience is characterised by a harmonious combination of song, instruments and “incessant” laughter: “With silver psalteries and jade mandolas, they sing voluptuously; In their hugging turquoise and clinging red, they laugh incessantly. 银筝玉玩

⁵⁶⁸ Although Peng Xu does not allude to *Jin Ping Mei* in her study about the gendered soundscapes and aesthetics of the courtesans’ performance spaces (2014), the novel’s depictions of remarkably noisy scenarios certainly align with her interpretations. Xu, "Courtesan vs. Literatus: Gendered Soundscapes and Aesthetics in Late-Ming Singing Culture."

放娇声，倚翠偎频笑语。”⁵⁶⁹ A similar example is found in Chapter 43, “Two ranks of pearls and trinkets are arrayed beneath the steps; the tones of pipes and voices hover about the banquet hall. 两行珠翠列阶前，一派笙歌临座上。”⁵⁷⁰ Extracts like these indicate that the guests were not always expected to focus their undivided attention on the music making; rather, they could freely indulge in other participative interactions, fomenting a more bustling ambiance (See also the discussion of participative/presentational performance in Chapter 3 of this dissertation).

Jin Ping Mei's descriptions of party soundscapes also make frequent reference to the sounds of drinking games. Among the many games that are mentioned, we encounter “passing the flower to the beat of the drum”, which obviously has musical associations:

唱毕，酒兴将阑。那白来创寻见园厅上，架著一面小小花框羯鼓，被他驮在湖山石后，又折一枝花来，要催花击鼓。

By the time they finished singing, the company's enthusiasm for drinking had begun to wane. Scrounger Pai discovered that there was a small, two-sided, barbarian drum on a stand in the garden reception hall and took it behind the T'ai-hu rockery, where he also picked a sprig of blossoms, so they could play the game of: Passing the Flower to the Beat of the Drum.⁵⁷¹ [David Roy translation]

Dice playing appears to have been one of the most common games at drinking banquets, and one can imagine that the sounds of the dice shaking and tumbling would have been characteristic motifs within the soundscape, along with myriad vocal reactions. A dice game called “Competing for the Red” is mentioned in the following example:

唱一套，姐儿两个拿上骰盆儿来，和西门庆抢红顽笑。杯来盏去，各添春色。

⁵⁶⁹ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume Four: The Climax*, 533.

⁵⁷⁰ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume Three: The Aphrodisiac*, 61.

⁵⁷¹ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume Three: The Aphrodisiac*, 335.

When they had finished singing the song suite, the two sisters brought out a dicebox and proceeded to amuse themselves by playing “Competing for the Red” with his-men Ch’ing. As they:

Passed their wine cups back and forth,

Their faces took on the glint of spring.⁵⁷² [David Roy translation]

Notably, the game in this episode takes place after a song performance. Presumably, in the courtesans’ workplaces, game sessions often took place during breaks between musical performances – or, perhaps, in certain contexts, the two activities occurred simultaneously.

In line with its erotic focus, *Jin Ping Mei* also makes frequent reference to the sounds made by moving clothing and jewellery – subtle yet deeply impactful. For courtesans, seduction was at the core of their professional lives and signalling seduction occurred throughout their interactions with clients in various ways (as investigated extensively in Chapter 6 of the current dissertation). But in the world of *Jin Ping Mei*, it is not just the courtesans who are willing to show their seductiveness, but also others, such as the protagonist Ximen Qing’s wives, concubines, and lovers.

An effective way to gain someone’s attention is to use clothes and delicate accessories to make slight noises when moving, in combination with facial expressions, movements, and gestures. The following example shows how Lady Lin seduces Ximen Qing using clothes, makeup, and the tinkling sounds of jade pendants:

林氏又早戴著满头珠翠，身穿大红通袖袍儿，…….搽抹的如银人也一般。梳著纵鬟，点著朱唇，耳带一双胡珠环子，裙拖垂两挂玉佩叮啷。

Her head was adorned with pearls and trinkets; her torso was garbed in a scarlet full-sleeved robe; ... her face was so heavily daubed with makeup that she resembled a silver figurine; her hair was done up in a raised coiffure; her lips were red with rouge; her earlobes were adorned with a pair of pearl earrings; and from the upper border of her skirt were suspended two strings of:

Jade pendants that tinkled when she moved.⁵⁷³ [David Roy translation]

⁵⁷² Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume Four: The Climax*, 560.

⁵⁷³ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume Four: The Climax*, 361.

A similar example is encountered in the episode when Ximen Qing sees his third wife for the first time. Here, too, the sounds of tinkling jade pendants exert a powerful seductive effect when combined with the woman's perfume and her other accessories:

二珠金环，耳边低挂；双头鸾钗，鬓后斜插。但行动，胸前摇响玉玲珑；坐下时，一阵麝兰香喷鼻。

Two gold rings, set with pearls,
Hang low beneath her ears;
A pair of phoenix hairpins,
Juts aslant at either temple.
She has only to move,
In order to make her openwork jade pendants tinkle;
Wherever she sits,

The reek of orchid and musk assails the nostrils.⁵⁷⁴ [David Roy translation]

In addition, *Jin Ping Mei*'s descriptions of party atmospheres pinpoint various other minor sonic details, which are similarly low in the mix and not directly related to the courtesans' central performance yet likewise add character to the overall soundscape. A particularly light-hearted example can be found in Chapter 78, when Ximen Qing begins snoring loudly even while some boy actors are singing:

到晚夕，堂中点起灯来，小优儿弹唱灯词。还未到起更时分，西门庆正陪著人坐的，就在席上鼾鼾的打起睡来。

That evening, as the lanterns in the chamber were lit, and the boy actors sang songs in celebration of the Lantern Festival, even before the first watch began, Hsi-men Ch'ing, while sitting in the presence of his guests, began to snore loudly as he dozed off.⁵⁷⁵

[David Roy translation]

⁵⁷⁴ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume One: The Gathering*, 133.

⁵⁷⁵ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume Four: The Climax*, 624.

5.4 Summary

Inspired by Steven Feld's 2012 study, I have explored the sonic spaces in *Jin Ping Mei* using a soundscape research perspective, delving into the symbolically significant sounds found in the novel. Each of the sounds carries deep emotional resonance and particular imagery, working in conjunction with one another within the context of an intricate symbolic network. I began the chapter by examining bird symbolism, with appropriate focus on the warbler and swallow. These are easily the most often-mentioned birds in the novel, and they are very commonly used as metaphors to highlight the courtesans' most admirable performance-related qualities. I have also parsed numerous descriptive passages and song lyrics teeming with avian and other nature-centric metaphors and symbols, showing how each is tied to a very particular set of ideas and sentiments, bearing implicit meanings that evocatively reflect a range of positive or negative emotions. I also show that many of these symbolic allusions recur multiple times throughout the novel as conspicuous, and highly effective, literary tropes: their formulaic and somewhat predictable repetition serves to pinpoint and emphasise the core ideals and emotions pervading the protagonists' lives – the latter encompassing feelings of romantic passion, yearning, loneliness, sorrow and more (explored earlier in Chapter 4). And, here, I argue that the protagonists' inner lives are almost always the narrator's primary focus, throughout the whole novel. The concluding segment of this chapter has delved into the auditory ambience of the courtesans' performance space, spotlighting the significance of seemingly inconsequential sounds, particularly within the context of drinking banquets. This analytical approach illuminates the interplay between sound and emotion, especially in the vibrant pleasure quarters of the Ming era.

In this chapter, I have aimed for a comprehensive collation and summary of the symbolically significant sounds in *Jin Ping Mei*, rather than cherry picking only those that relate directly to the core focus of this study: the courtesans' music-making. There are two primary reasons for this approach. Firstly, as the novel's song texts suggest (and as other anthologies such as *Wu Ji Bai Mei* (see Chapter 2 and Appendix), these diverse symbols appear within the courtesans' song repertoire, as powerful means for expressing complex ideas and emotions. Secondly, in line with the central observations of soundscape luminaries

such as R. Murray Schafer and Stephen Feld, I argue that the soundscape and the sonic symbolic world should ideally be examined in its entirety because all its composite elements operate as active agents in the listener's mind, working simultaneously in relation to one another. As outlined at the start of the chapter, I think this approach is key to reconstructing the sensual world that the courtesans inhabited.

Having systematically appraised the full range of symbolic sounds alluded to in *Jin Ping Mei*, two keywords encapsulate my perception of the courtesans' milieu within this captivating narrative: diversity and opulence. Within the courtesans' surroundings, one discerns immense diversity spanning avian chirps and other nature sounds, game-related noises, the sounds of tinkling ornaments, laughter, talking, whispering, and, naturally, the melodic and rhythmic sounds of music. Working alongside captivating fragrances and myriad textures, colours, and tastes, an enticing multisensory environment is forged, meticulously crafted to beguile.

Regarding the clients depicted in *Jin Ping Mei*, they emerge as true connoisseurs of emotion. This is perhaps to be expected, given that the novel was penned by a male author, one who likely had frequent interactions with courtesans and was a patron of brothels. Like Feng Menglong and other key commenters on the period (discussed in Chapter 4), he was keen to portray himself and others like him as having achieved a state of heightened emotional sensitivity, meticulously noting every nuance in their surroundings and excelling at discerning the rich emotional subtext underlying even the most seemingly insignificant detail.

Jin Ping Mei emphasises the courtesans' primary role of catering to diverse indulgences – ensuring that their clients could appreciate stimulating musical performances, relish opulent surroundings, drink wine and eat gourmet meals, playing together, and engage in intimate encounters. Socializing with courtesans offered these men mental respite, a realm of stimulation and engagement distinct from other facets of their lives, including marital commitments. Here, they could immerse themselves in pure entertainment and a host of satisfying interactions without any distractions. In the subsequent chapter, I will delve deeper into the courtesans' utilization of allure within performance arenas and living quarters, aiming to further explore the universe they inhabited.

6. Signalling Seduction: The Courtship Strategies of Ming Era Courtesans

Courtesans have often been seen as symbols of sex, lust, and seduction, commonly represented as embodying dangerous pleasure and a threat to social order.⁵⁷⁶ In the novels, drama scripts, anecdotes, and other literary works of the Ming dynasty, courtesans are often portrayed as idealized figures, endowed with the cultural aspirations of frustrated literati.⁵⁷⁷ Nevertheless, in vernacular literature represented by songbooks, negative images of courtesans abound. They are referred to as having “sweet mouths and cruel hearts” 嘴甜心狠, being “selfish” 自私 and “egoistic” 自私自利, being “good at manipulating people” 善於操纵人心, and so on, indicating that they are not to be trusted. The Ming era songbook of folksong lyrics *Gua Zhi'er* 挂枝儿 (Hanging Branches), compiled by the renowned literatus Feng Menglong 冯梦龙, contains some highly evocative satirical lyrics about courtesans’ lifestyles and characters. For example, the song “Fear of Sneaking Off” 怕闪 complains about brothel courtesan conduct from a male’s perspective:

风月中的事儿难猜难解，风月中的人儿个个会弄乖。难道就没一个真实的在？
我被人闪怕了，闪人的再莫来。你若来时也，（将）闪人的法儿改。

Things in the pleasure quarters are difficult to fathom and solve, everyone who lives there indulging in flattery and showing off their cleverness. Is there a single sincere person? I fear it when people sneak off, for those who slip away, don’t return. If you come, you should not slip away again!⁵⁷⁸

Although not specified, the “people” in this verse clearly refers to courtesans, the author complaining about what he perceives as their typical qualities: insincerity, duplicity, showing

⁵⁷⁶ Rosenthal, *The Honest Courtesan: Veronica Franco, Citizen and Writer in Sixteenth-Century Venice*, 15.

⁵⁷⁷ Keith McMahan, "The Pornographic Doctrine of a Loyalist Ming Novel: Social Decline and Sexual Disorder in Preposterous Words (Guwangyan)," in *Sexuality in China: Histories of Power and Pleasure*, ed. Howard Chiang (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2018), 58-65.

⁵⁷⁸ Feng Menglong, *Gua zhi'er shan'ge taixia xin zou* 挂枝儿 山歌 太霞新奏 [Hanging branches, mountain songs, new music of Taixia], 60.

off, and flattery. “Sneaking off”, which appears throughout the texts in this collection, can be understood as the primary “fault” of courtesans: after taking one’s heart and money, they are liable to disappear.

Similar sentiments are evident in the lyrics for the Ming era song “Bewitching” (哄 *hong*), which puts forward the idea that sincerity is rare and priceless in brothel culture. Feng Menglong elaborates on this observation in his additional commentary for the song:

青楼中有三字经曰「烘」、「哄」、「訇」。又曰：烘如火，哄如蛊，訇如虎。金樽檀板，绣幄香衾，馋眼生波，热肠欲沸，所谓烘也。粉阵迷魂，花妖醉魄；情浓若酒，盟重如山。哄人伎俩，兹百出矣。已而愿奢未遂，誓重难酬，寡醋谁堪，闲槽易跳，百年之约，訇而止。故曰「十分真只好当三分用」。识得此意，大落便宜。⁵⁷⁹

In brothels, three words serve as a motto: *hōng* (heating 烘), *hǒng* (bewitching 哄), *hōng* (roaring 訇). It is said that *hōng* is like roasting by fire, *hǒng* is like cajoling through deceiving, and *hōng* is like a tiger roaring. With golden cups and sandalwood clappers, embroidered curtains and fragrant quilts, lustful eyes are filled with waves of desire, and hearts are about to boil: this is the so-called heating (*hōng*). The array of beauties with powdered faces can captivate souls and, like flower goblins, intoxicate spirits. Emotions are as strong as wine, and vows as heavy as mountains. Here, the tricks employed to cajole people number over a hundred kinds. Yet shortly afterwards, people’s wishes are too extravagant to meet, and vows too heavy to uphold. When the gratuitous jealousy is unbearable, it becomes easy to “jump into a new tile groove”.⁵⁸⁰ A century-long oath ends abruptly with a loud clash. Hence, it is said, “Treat the utmost sincerity as merely moderate honesty.” Those who understand this will benefit greatly.

⁵⁷⁹ Feng Menglong, *Gua zhi'er shan'ge taixia xinzou* 挂枝儿 山歌 太霞新奏 [Hanging branches, mountain songs, new music of Taixia], 65.

⁵⁸⁰ Here, implying “it is easy for a man of leisure to find a new lover”.

Here, through detailing the three “*hong*”s, Feng delineates some key defining aspects of brothel life: the warm and seductive atmosphere, the courtesans’ seductive strategies, and the often unpleasant endings of romantic liaisons. The first *hōng* (“heating”) pertains to arousing emotions, typically aided through offering a luxurious, inviting atmosphere with opulent details such as golden goblets and embroidered curtains. The courtesans’ hospitality, enhanced through seductive eye contact, amplifies the guests’ ardour. Here, Feng’s mention of sandalwood clappers notably underscores the pivotal role of music in heightening the effect – the clappers being particularly commonly employed as accompaniment to “pure singing” (detailed in Chapter 3). The second key characteristic, *hǒng*, denoting “bewitching”, “coaxing” or “deceiving”, emphasizes the captivating power of courtesans, with the “groups of singing girls” being metaphorically compared to “flower goblins”. Amidst the free flow of wine, vows are repeatedly exchanged, but these oaths, rendered frivolous under alcohol’s influence, erode sincere emotions. The narrative notes over a hundred deceptive tactics, underscoring the frequent unreliability of the commitments made in brothels. The third keyword concludes the section – *hōng* meaning “roaring”, or “loud crash” – appearing within a few sentences roughly sketching the breakdown of intimate relationships, and revealing that the love generated in brothels was precarious and often ended in unseemly quarrels.

Feng Menglong gathered the songs in *Gua Zhi’er* (Hanging Branches) from urban areas,⁵⁸¹ and the prevalent romantic themes and vulgar language reflect his primary focus on brothel culture. A total of 31 songs in the collection directly refer to courtesans or pertain to brothel culture. In the commentary beneath the song “Account” (帐 *zhang*), Feng mentions that it was a courtesan proficient in *pipa* performance and solo singing named A Yuan who provided him with the lyrics.⁵⁸² And in his commentary for the song “Farewell (送别

⁵⁸¹ Another songbook compiled by Feng Menglong is *Shan’ge* 山歌 (Mountain Songs), a collection of folk songs from the Suzhou region. The theme of the songs is mostly love, a large part depicting illicit but passionate love (*siqing* 私情 “secret love”). Yasushi Ōki, “Wanton, but not Bad: Women in Feng Menglong’s Mountain Songs,” in *Wanton Women in Late-Imperial Chinese Literature: Models, Genres, Subversions and Traditions*, ed. Mark Stevenson and Cuncun Wu, *Women and Gender in China Studies* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 129. Ōki, “Women in Feng Menglong’s Mountain Songs,” 131-37.

⁵⁸² Feng Menglong, *Gua zhi’er shan’ge taixia xinzou* 挂枝儿 山歌 太霞新奏 [Hanging branches, mountain songs, new music of Taixia], 32.

songbie)”,⁵⁸³ Feng Menglong reminisces about his personal interactions with the courtesan protagonist, Feng Xisheng.

In the examples above, and elsewhere also, the Ming period male authors meticulously interpret, or possibly over-interpret, the minutiae of the courtesans’ behaviour. Although their overall critical assessment tends to be negative, they nonetheless recognize (and sometimes exaggerate) the women’s often sophisticated skills in the art of seduction.

In the previous chapter, I detailed how the courtesans’ performance space was characterized by a wealth of distinctive and deeply meaningful sounds. It is evident that the courtesans took a lead role in characterising this sensory scenario in their realm, contributing auditory stimuli (appealing voices, laughter, musical performances), visual stimuli (myriad gestures, eye-contact, clothing, and ornaments), tactile stimuli (touching), and taste stimuli (food and drinks). These ingratiating behaviours can be understood as signals of seduction sent by the courtesans to their guests, whether for money or other purposes. This chapter delves deeply into the courtesans’ methods for signalling and achieving seduction, drawing together findings from Ming period literature and behavioural studies, with the aim of advancing a fascinating, yet scarcely addressed, research field.

Before focusing on the courtesans’ specific seduction strategies, however, it is necessary to give a brief introduction to the Ming era aesthetic ideals regarding courtesan appearance and behaviour. To be evaluated as a well-rounded, desirable courtesan, a woman had to have a beautiful appearance, talents in performance (here, employing the word ‘performance’ to cover a wide spectrum of behaviours), aesthetic tastes in line with the literati-scholars’ values, and a seductive manner sufficient to sexually attract clients. Certain Ming period literati asserted that seductive looks and manners, which they called *mei* 媚, could greatly enhance a woman’s beauty (- as highlighted in the Preface to *Wu Ji Bai Mei*, see Chapter 2). For example, the renowned aesthetician Li Yu 李漁 expounded in detail the qualities a perfect woman should possess in his treatise *Xian Qing Ou Ji* 闲情偶寄 (Sketches of Idle Pleasures). Although beautiful appearance took precedence over

⁵⁸³ Feng Menglong, *Gua zhi'er shan'ge taixia xin zou* 挂枝儿 山歌 太霞新奏 [Hanging branches, mountain songs, new music of Taixia], 44.

seductiveness (媚态 *meitai*), Li Yu fully affirmed the importance of seductiveness in feminine beauty:

媚态之在人身，犹火之有焰，灯之有光，珠贝金银之有宝色，是无形之物，非有形之物也。

To human beings, seductiveness is like the flame is to the fire, light is to the lamp, and shine is to jewelry. These are invisible, not tangible things.

.....

今之女子，每有状貌姿容一无可取，而能令人思之不倦，甚至舍命相从者，皆“态”之一字之为崇也。⁵⁸⁴

Considering today's women, if there is a person today who has no redeeming feature in appearance or physique but she can make someone long for her tirelessly, even risking his life to follow her, it is because of her “seductiveness” that she is praised.

The extent of Li Yu's interest in feminine aesthetics is reflected in his attention to detail, covering diverse aspects of women's culture. For example, he also expressed insights about the types of instrument women should study. Thus, playing the *xiao* (vertical flute) would emphasize a woman's charms, making her “jade bamboo-like fingers seem more and more slender 玉笋为之愈尖” and her “vermillion lips become smaller 朱唇因而越小”.⁵⁸⁵ Meanwhile, singing and dancing could make a woman's voice “sound like the callings of swallows and warblers 随口发声，皆有燕语莺啼之致” and her body “lighter”, further adding to her charms. As he put it: “the way she turns around and walks can make willow twigs wiggle and flowers bloom 回身举步，悉带柳翻花笑之容”.⁵⁸⁶

Although it initially seems to contradict his assertions about the enhancement of charms through training, Li Yu states that “attitudes are innate, and cannot be obtained by force 态自

⁵⁸⁴ Li Yu, *Xian qing ou ji* 闲情偶寄 [Sketches of idle pleasures] [1671], 2 vols., vol. 1, ed. Shuying Du (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2014), 273-4.

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid.

天生，非可強造”。Presumably, here, “attitudes” is referring to something more deeply rooted within an individual’s personality. Another Ming writer with similar views was Wanyuzi 宛瑜子, who elaborated his interpretation of *mei* in the preface of *Wu Ji Bai Mei* 吳姬百媚 (Seductive Courtesans in Suzhou Area). He considered natural seductiveness to be the optimal topping for a courtesan.⁵⁸⁷

Next, I will turn to consider western academic literature exploring the nature of seductiveness. Although extensive research has been carried out on human non-verbal courtship behaviour,⁵⁸⁸ very little research has been focused on courtesans’ seductive signalling. There is, however, a small body of seduction scholarship focusing on modern performers. For example, Bart Barendregt (2006) investigates the changing art of seduction in his analysis of the relationship between ritual courtship, performing art, and erotic entertainment, focusing on Japanese geisha and Thai transgender performers.⁵⁸⁹ And Judith Hanna (2012) systematically unpacks the strategies of seduction employed by American female exotic dancers.⁵⁹⁰ In the field of ethnomusicology, Frank Kouwenhoven and James Kippen’s book (2012) presents a collection of articles exploring the seductive elements operational in a variety of performance contexts from around the world.⁵⁹¹

Hereafter, in this chapter, I aim to expand the small body of performance-focused seduction studies by examining pre-modern historical practices – specifically, those of the Ming courtesans. The main approach of this study is a literary analysis of the representation of Ming courtesans’ seduction strategies from various literary genres. By careful and critical analysis of Ming literary textual resources including novels, lyric poetry collections, and

⁵⁸⁷ For a more detailed discussion of Wanyuzi’s interpretation of *mei*, see Chapter 2.

⁵⁸⁸ To list a few studies: Flora Davis, *Inside intuition: What we know about nonverbal communication*, vol. 68 (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973). Irenäus Eibl-Eibesfeldt and Geoffrey Strachan, *Love and hate: The natural history of behavior patterns* (New York: Routledge, 2017). Albert Mehrabian, *Nonverbal Communication* (New York: Routledge, 1972). Laura K. Guerrero and Kory Floyd, *Nonverbal Communication in Close Relationships* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

⁵⁸⁹ Bart Barendregt, "The changing art of seduction: ritual courtship, performing prostitutes, erotic entertainment," *IJAS Newsletter* 40 (2006), <https://doi.org/https://hdl.handle.net/1887/12706>.

⁵⁹⁰ Judith Lynne Hanna, "Empowerment: The Art of Seduction in Adult Entertainment Exotic Dance," in *Music, Dance, and the Art of Seduction*, ed. Frank Kouwenhoven and James Kippen (Delft, The Netherlands: Eburon Academic Publishers, 2012).

⁵⁹¹ Kouwenhoven and Kippen, *Music, dance and the art of seduction*.

literati notes, it is possible to identify the various seductive practices that they typically employed and which, I argue, were essential defining features of their profession. I also use contemporaneous historical art sources, such as paintings and woodblock illustrations, to combine textual sources with visual art works, with a view to reconstructing how authors and readers wished to conceive of interactions with courtesans.

6.1 Some Essential Definitions: “Seduction” and “Courtship”

Deriving from the French word “*séduction*”, the English word “seduce” first appears in the late fifteenth century, meaning “to persuade (someone) to abandon their duty”. The original root of these words is the Latin verb “*seducere*”, where “*se-*” means “away” and “*ducere*” means “to lead”. Further definitions include “to entice (someone) into sexual activity”, “to entice (someone) to do or believe something inadvisable or foolhardy”, and “to attract powerfully”.⁵⁹² These same definitions permeate scholarship also. For example, Judith Hanna (2012) expertly conflates them in her study about American adult nude dance, where she succinctly pinpoints some key seductive strategies: “alluring, bewitching, tantalizing, beguiling, inveigling (winning over by coaxing), flattering and exploiting”⁵⁹³ – unsurprisingly, much the same strategies encountered in Ming period descriptions of courtesan practices (for example, detailed in Feng Menglong’s commentary about “Bewitching” at the start of this chapter).

Meanwhile, “courtship” is variously defined as “a period during which a couple develop a romantic relationship before getting married”, “behaviour designed to persuade someone to marry or develop a romantic relationship”, “the behaviour of animals aimed at attracting a mate”, and “the action of attempting to win a person’s favour or support”.⁵⁹⁴ Ultimately, as David Givens argues (2005), courtship involves “encircling” someone or bringing them into a central position in one’s world – the meaning of the ancient Indo-

⁵⁹² Angus Stevenson, *Oxford Dictionary of English* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2010), 29942.

⁵⁹³ Hanna, "Empowerment: The Art of Seduction in Adult Entertainment Exotic Dance," 200.

⁵⁹⁴ Stevenson, *Oxford Dictionary of English*, 7381.

European root “*gher-*”.⁵⁹⁵ In human cultures, intimate sexual contact is achieved through courtship, a negotiation based on nonverbal signals and verbal communication.⁵⁹⁶ Of course, as Bath L. Bailey details in her study of twentieth-century courtship practices in America, the strategies that men and women apply in their pursuits of intimacy are often not geared towards marriage. Indeed, the psychosocial objectives tend to be complex and varied and, of course, most courtship behaviour does not reach the intimate stage, let alone marriage.⁵⁹⁷

In the world of the Ming period pleasure quarters, the courtesans did not generally engage in courtship practices and call upon seductive strategies for the purposes of securing marriage. Rather, courtship and seduction were routinised as defining features of their profession – in other words, primary means for serving their clients and achieving higher returns (money, connections, reputation, and more). Here, then, I propose that courtesans’ courtship was geared towards winning favour for personal benefit. In addition, I argue that, in the courtesan-guest relationship, the courtesan tended to take a more active role of self-presentation (in subtle or bold ways, emitting verbal or non-verbal signals) in comparison with courtship patterns in other realms. In the courtesan’s realm, she was the performer, the seducer, and action-taker; meanwhile, the male guest would often become the viewer, the object of seduction, and the action-follower.

6.2 Courtship Process in the Pleasure Quarters: Four Phases

Researchers of human courtship identify courtship behaviour to be sequentially ordered across multiple stages. Psychiatrist Albert Scheflen (1965), for example, famously examined courtship messaging between therapists and clients, identifying the following behaviours, spread across four stages: displaying courtship readiness (such as tensing muscles and straightening torso); preening (stroking hair, glancing in the mirror, neatening clothing);

⁵⁹⁵ David Givens, *Love signals: A practical field guide to the body language of courtship* (New York: Macmillan, 2005), 34-35.

⁵⁹⁶ Givens, *Love signals: A practical field guide to the body language of courtship*.

⁵⁹⁷ Beth L. Bailey, *From front porch to back seat: Courtship in twentieth-century America* (Baltimore, Maryland: JHU Press, 1989), 6.

presenting positional cues (leaning forward, adopting more intimate conversational mode); and giving cues of invitation (flirtatious eye movements, displaying palms, rolling the hip).⁵⁹⁸ Schefflen influentially argued that many, but not all, of these behaviours would surely be universals of courtship behaviour. Subsequently, Ray Birdwhistell (1971) portrayed more than 20 steps from initial male and female interaction to the completion of an intimate sexual relationship,⁵⁹⁹ while Desmond Morris (1971) narrowed the sequence down to twelve steps (though fast couples could skip certain stages).⁶⁰⁰ Around ten years later, Joan Lockard and Robert Adams (1980) observed a large number of couples and classified their courting behaviours according to different ages and genders, identifying numerous key signals such as kissing, handholding, hugging, self-grooming, eye contact, smiling, laughing, touching and playing.⁶⁰¹ Meanwhile, by applying self-report research methods (such as surveys and interviews), Clinton Jesser (1978) and others have further confirmed just how important nonverbal signalling is in courtship behaviour,⁶⁰² with women tending to use indirect nonverbal signalling strategies more extensively than men in most contexts.⁶⁰³ Subsequent scholarship in this field has both confirmed and built upon the pioneering work outlined above, with, for example, David Buss presenting an especially detailed exploration into seduction strategies and, crucially, highlighting the prevalence of conflict, competition and manipulation in the realm of courtship – these being recurrent themes in the Ming period accounts also.⁶⁰⁴

⁵⁹⁸ Albert E. Schefflen, "Quasi-courtship behavior in psychotherapy," *Psychiatry* 28, no. 3 (1965): 247-48, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/00332747.1965.11023433>.

⁵⁹⁹ Ray L. Birdwhistell, *Kinesics and Context: Essays on Body-Motion Communication* (London: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), 158-79.

⁶⁰⁰ D. Morris, *Intimate Behavior* (New York: Random House, 1971), 74-79.

⁶⁰¹ Joan S. Lockard and Robert M. Adams, "Courtship behaviors in public: Different age/sex roles," *Ethology and Sociobiology* 1, no. 3 (1980): 245-53, [https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/0162-3095\(80\)90011-4](https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/0162-3095(80)90011-4).

⁶⁰² Clinton J. Jesser, "Male responses to direct verbal sexual initiatives of females," *Journal of Sex Research* 14, no. 2 (1978): 122-23, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/00224497809551000>.

⁶⁰³ Timothy Perper and David L. Weis, "Proceptive and rejective strategies of US and Canadian college women," *Journal of Sex Research* 23, no. 4 (1987): 462-78, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/00224498709551385>. Catherine L. Clark, Phillip R. Shaver, and Matthew F. Abrahams, "Strategic behaviors in romantic relationship initiation," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 25, no. 6 (1999): 709, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167299025006006>.

⁶⁰⁴ David M. Buss, *The Evolution of Desire: Strategies of Human Mating* (New York: Basic Books, 2016), 1-5.

As suggested above, the field of courtship studies has centred on modern courtship patterns in the West, and it is evident that a large portion of the observations do not map directly onto Ming period courtship practices. Different research objects and cultural contexts need to be treated differently, being sensitive to cultural specificity. Comparing modern courtship behaviours with the interaction between courtesans and guests in the Ming era brothel context, although some of the behaviours are shared (such as quick glances or coy giggles),⁶⁰⁵ others are less likely to occur in the early stages of a Ming-era courtship context (such as kissing, touching thighs, and other behaviours). Therefore, it is necessary to consider the courtesans' practices on their own terms, drawing from the evidence while being wary of overly speculative reasoning.

Based on my analysis of Ming period descriptions, I divide the courtesans' courtship process into four phases: attention catching, interacting and developing intimacy, lovemaking, and post-passion transition back to mundane interaction (see Figure 6.1).

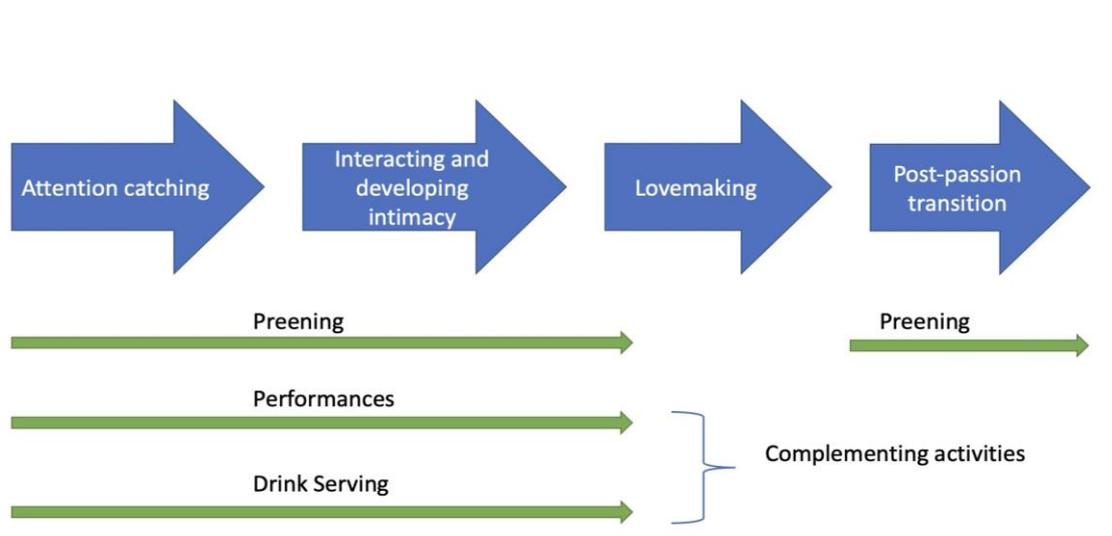


Figure 6.1: A diagrammatic representation of the Ming courtesans' courtship processes

⁶⁰⁵ Eibl-Eibesfeldt and Strachan, *Love and hate: The natural history of behavior patterns*, 50.

Certain courtship-related behaviours evidently occur throughout much of this four-part process: for example, preening runs through all phases except phase three (lovemaking) and individuals would typically also indulge in performance, drink serving, and other complementary activities to help advance the courtship proceedings (mainly in the first two phases). It is hard to determine to what extent there would have been clear boundaries between these phases, though I suspect, on the basis of the forementioned courtship studies, overlap would have been typical.

My four-part schema draws influence from several key theorists' classifications of courtship behaviour, including Schefflen's forementioned four-part model (1965), Morris's study of universal intimate behaviour (1971), Lockard and Adams' analysis of public courtship behaviour (1980), and Buss's extended study (2016). Unfortunately, the surviving Ming period literary works do not provide sufficiently detailed, systematic evidence to construct a more expansive multi-part schema. However, I maintain that many of them offer accurate (though partial) representations. After all, there is ample evidence that the literati were frequenters of brothels, with extensive first-hand experience of the courtesans' practices. For instance, many pieces in Feng Menglong's songbooks *Shan 'ge* and *Gua Zhi'er* uncover Ming era courtesans' daily lives and affective states.⁶⁰⁶ Addressed extensively in the preceding chapter, *Jin Ping Mei* 金瓶梅 (The Plum in the Golden Vase) depicts a large number of brothel and courtesan related scenes, some taking place in brothels and others in private household parties. Written by Wanyuzi 宛瑜子 during the Wanli Period (1573-1620), *Wu Ji Bai Mei* 吴姬百媚 is a book about courtesan-ranking in the Suzhou area, with a wealth of poems, lyrics, and comments made about them.

⁶⁰⁶ Feng Menglong, *Gua zhi'er shan'ge taixia xinzou* 挂枝儿 山歌 太霞新奏 [Hanging branches, mountain songs, new music of Taixia].

6.2.1 Preening, Musical Performance, and Drinking

Before examining each courtship phase in succession, it is necessary to explore the elements that recurred frequently throughout much of the proceedings: preening, musical performance (singing, dancing, and playing instruments), and drinking.

Preening is a conspicuous feature at any stage but is most common in the preparation stage. Scheflen states that preening tends to be an endeavour to perfect one's appearance.⁶⁰⁷ Common manifestations include grooming one's hair, retouching makeup, and rearranging clothes.⁶⁰⁸ Not surprisingly, Ming-era literary works are packed full of references to preening, usually including richly detailed descriptions that show the gorgeousness of the ideal courtesans' clothing and accessories and indicate the extensive time and effort they devoted to their physical appearance. A lavish example of this is presented in *Jin Ping Mei* when the courtesan Li Guijie is being described:

于是向月娘镜台前，重新妆照打扮出来。众人看见他头戴银丝髻髻，周围金累丝钗梳，珠翠堆满。上著藕丝衣裳，下著翠绫裙。尖尖翘翘一对红鸳。粉面贴著三个翠面花儿，一阵异香喷鼻。

Thereupon, she availed herself of Yue-niang's mirror stand to retouch her makeup and adjust her attire and then went out to the reception hall.

When the company looked up, they saw that on her head she wore:

A chignon enclosed in a fret of silver filigree,

fastened in place all round with:

Gold filigree pins and combs,

on which:

Pearls and trinkets rose in piles.

Above, she wore:

A blouse of pale lavender silk;

⁶⁰⁷ Scheflen, "Quasi-courtship behavior in psychotherapy," 247.

⁶⁰⁸ Scheflen, "Quasi-courtship behavior in psychotherapy," 247-48.

below, she wore:

A skirt of turquoise satin,

revealing:

The upturned points of her tiny golden lotuses,

Decorated with a pair of red phoenixes.

On her painted face she wore:

Three turquoise beauty patches;

From her body:

A gust of exotic fragrance assailed the nostrils.⁶⁰⁹ [David Roy translation]

The first sentence of this passage details a series of typical preening behaviours that Guijie engaged in before appearing in public: checking her appearance in the mirror, touching up her make-up, and rearranging her clothing. The ensuing descriptions then indicate that Guijie had dressed herself elaborately and meticulously before her reveal: the silver, gold and pearl-encrusted hair jewellery and silk blouse which were the embodiment of luxury; the delicate make-up on her face; the red phoenixes adorning her tiny golden lotus-like feet and the exotic aroma; all were elements of seduction.

Preening is also often a symbolic performative act, intended to be viewed by others.⁶¹⁰ The next example – a song text from *Jin Ping Mei* – demonstrates how this kind of preening would occur in the later stages of courtship also. In this case, the penultimate sentence indicates that the two protagonists spent the previous night together. Here, the woman coyly adjusts her delicate hair accessories to evoke particular effects in her lover who is watching on:

转过雕阑正见他，斜倚定茶蘼架。佯羞整凤钗，不说昨宵话。
笑吟吟，捏将花片儿打。

⁶⁰⁹ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin Ping Mei, Volume Two: The Rivals*, 254-55.

⁶¹⁰ Schefflen, "Quasi-courtship behavior in psychotherapy," 247-48.

Skirting the carved balustrade, he catches sight of her,
Leaning against the rose-leaved raspberry trellis.
Coyly adjusting her phoenix hairpin,
She says nothing of last night's events,
But, smiling ingratiatingly,
Plucks a blossom and tosses it at him.⁶¹¹ [David Roy translation]

In addition to the act of preening, musical performances and drinking also appear to have occurred throughout much of the courtship process, providing complementary sensory stimuli to evoke a conducive mood. Figure 6.2 (below) is a Ming era visual presentation illustrating the strong link between alcohol consumption and courtesanship activities.

⁶¹¹ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume Three: The Aphrodisiac*, 496.



Figure 6.2: *Changyin Tu* 豪饮图 (A picture of cheerful drinking).⁶¹² The text in the picture indicates that this is “The Number One courtesan, Feng Wuai 冯无埃”. Situated on the left, she is smiling as she watches the man sitting opposite, with drinking cups in front of them. They are sitting in a garden surrounded by rocks and plants, with mountains behind.

Source: Wanyuzi 宛瑜子. *Wu Ji Bai Mei* 吴姬百媚 [Seductive Courtesans in Suzhou Area]. Beijing: Beijing Library Press, 2002.

Drinking and musical performance tend to occur together as near-essential components of the brothel experience. As detailed in Chapter 3, a wide variety of musical forms are recorded as having been performed in brothels, including ensemble music making, singing with instrumental accompaniment, and unaccompanied singing (or sometimes with just a beat provided, for example by a fan or clappers). The music performed by Ming era courtesans can be broadly divided into opera extracts (from traditions like *chuanqi* opera 传奇 and *kunqu* opera 昆曲, widely praised by Ming literati) and stand-alone songs (including *sanqu*, with

⁶¹² Wanyuzi, *Wu ji bai mei* 吴姬百媚 [Seductive courtesans in Suzhou area].

styles and lyrics considered especially artistic, and more rustic, popular *xiaoqu*, which originated in the countryside and later became popular in brothel contexts).⁶¹³ Meanwhile, as detailed in Chapter 3, the contexts for a typical courtesan performance could be noisy drinking parties, banquets, or more tranquil and intimate gatherings.⁶¹⁴ Much importance was attached to vocal expression over instrumental display, in line with the literati circle's conviction in the aesthetic superiority of vocal melody. Hence, as detailed earlier, the northern style of performance (emphasizing stringed instrumental accompaniment and adapting a heroic, rough singing style),⁶¹⁵ which was popular in the first half of the Ming dynasty, was gradually replaced by the southern style (focusing on subtle vocal melodic artistry, with light instrumental accompaniment).⁶¹⁶

In many cases, music performance was interspersed amongst other activities, such as game playing, drinking, and conversation, playing a major role in stimulating an alluring atmosphere, strengthening a sense of continuity, and engaging the clients' full attentions – distracting them away from other mundane concerns.

The following two examples demonstrate the typical pairing of music and drink in the courtship context. The first is taken from the late Ming-era man of letters Yu Huai's 余怀 memoirs of courtesan culture in Qinhuai region, *Banqiao Zaji* 板桥杂记 (Miscellaneous Records of the Plank Bridge). The scene depicts the ample employment of musical performance in banquets hosted by the courtesan Li Da-niang: "During grand feasts and gatherings, they played the *pipa* and the zither in unison... When they had had enough wine, they would play the ten-instrument ensemble. 置酒高会，则合弹琵琶、箏.....酒半，打十番鼓。"⁶¹⁷

⁶¹³ *Zhongguo quxue da cidian* 中国曲学大辞典 [Dictionary of Chinese qu study], ed. Qi Senhua, Chen Duo, and Ye Changhai (Zhejiang: Zhejiang Education press, 1997), 5. For a more detailed discussion, see Chapter 2.

⁶¹⁴ Xu, "Courtesan vs. Literatus: Gendered Soundscapes and Aesthetics in Late-Ming Singing Culture," 405-11.

⁶¹⁵ Che Xilun and Liu Xiaojing, "Xiaochang kao '小唱' 考 [On discussion of xiaochang]," *Zhonghua xiqu* 中华戏曲, no. 1 (2007): 186.

⁶¹⁶ Wang Jide, *Qulü zhushi* 曲律注释 [Notes on the rules of qu] [1624], ed. Chen Duo and Ye Changhai (Shanghai: Shanghai Chinese Classics Publishing House, 2002). See also: Zeitlin, "'Notes of Flesh' and the Courtesan's Song in Seventeenth-Century China." Xu, "Courtesan vs. Literatus: Gendered Soundscapes and Aesthetics in Late-Ming Singing Culture," 412-13. Xu, "Lost Sound: Singing, Theatre, and Aesthetics in Late Ming China, 1547-1644."

⁶¹⁷ Yu Huai, "Miscellaneous Records of the Plank Bridge 板桥杂记 [1693]," 93-94.

The second example is a Ming era popular song that vividly describes what a late-night brothel guest would be treated to — wine, games, and songs:

夜客

站阶头一更多，姻缘天凑。叫一声有客来，点灯（来）上楼。夜深东道须将就，摆个寡榼子，猜拳豁指头。唱一只《打枣竿儿》也，（客官）再请一杯酒。

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Night guest

Standing on the stairs from seven to nine at night, waiting, my marriage is pieced together by Heaven. Shouting out that the guest is here, I light the lamp (and) go upstairs. At midnight, please bear with your host, setting out the bland wine and playing a finger-guessing game. Singing the tune *Beating the Jujube Branches*, (my guest,) please have another glass of wine.

It comes as no surprise that the courtesans and clients relied extensively on drink and music to achieve their goals – these being powerful tools for manipulating mood and emotion.

The following example demonstrates that musical performance could sometimes continue throughout the courtship process, right up to the intimacy stage. Here, the courtesan Sister Mei provides a variety of performances (instrument playing, singing, and dancing) to her favourite guest, Qin Zhong, until he is deeply affected, and they go to bed together:

是夜，美娘吹弹歌舞，曲尽生平之技，奉承秦重。秦重如做了一个游仙好梦，喜得魄荡魂消，手舞足蹈。夜深酒阑，二人相挽就寝。

That evening, Sister Mei played her musical instruments, sang, and danced, trying to please him to the best of her ability. Qin Zhong was thrown into raptures and almost danced for joy, feeling as if he were in a dream, roaming the fairyland. When night came and the wine was finished, the two of them went to bed in each other's arms.⁶¹⁹
[Shuhui Yang and Yunqing Yang translation]

⁶¹⁸ Feng Menglong, *Gua zhi'er shan'ge taixia xinze* 挂枝儿 山歌 太霞新奏 [Hanging branches, mountain songs, new music of Taixia], 128.

⁶¹⁹ Feng Menglong, *Stories to Awaken the World* 醒世恒言 [1627], 69-70.

Having now introduced these three central elements that ran through much of the courtship experience – preening, musical performance, and drinking – discussion will presently turn to explore the four phases of courtship in succession.

6.2.2 Attention Catching

In line with the observations of behavioural studies researchers, descriptions of the courtesans' initial courtship behaviours often include references to seduction signals such as posture readiness display, prop manipulation, interest-showing gesture, and shift in vocal register.

Scheflen (1965) details some key physical changes that typically characterize the initial stage of courtship, including high muscle tension, brighter eyes, and a change in skin tone from blush to pale.⁶²⁰ Not surprisingly, Ming period descriptions of early-phase courtship also highlight these kinds of transformation, for example:

建封与乐天俱喜调韵清雅，视其精神举止，但见：花生丹脸，水剪双眸，意态天然，迥出伦辈。回视其余诸妓，粉黛如土。

Charmed by the sweet music, Jiangfeng and Bai Juyi took a good look at the player and saw that, with rosy cheeks and bright, sparkling eyes, she had a far more refined and natural air than her peers. Turning their eyes to the other courtesans, Jiangfeng and Bai Juyi found them all as unworthy as dirt.⁶²¹ [Shuhui Yang and Yunqing Yang translation]

Here, the focal courtesan's rosy cheeks and sparkling eyes clearly exert a powerful impact upon the two male audience members. It is not clear from the text whether the courtesan is in courtship mode at this point and sending out seductive signals; after an intense

⁶²⁰ Scheflen, "Quasi-courtship behavior in psychotherapy," 247.

⁶²¹ Feng Menglong, *Stories to Caution the World* 警世通言 [1624], 143.

pipa performance, the performer's body would surely undergo changes resembling those of the courtship state, such as a rosy complexion. However, this description highlights the powerful allure exerted by such physical attributes on observers, whether that allure is intended or not.

6.2.2.1 Posture readiness

In animal courtship, Gersick and Kurzban suggest that males typically display their most admirable qualities openly, broadcasting their signals as widely as possible with intentions of securing the best mate.⁶²² In contrast, flirting, which is believed to be a behaviour exclusively for humans and primates, varies greatly in its manifestations, ranging from overt postures and behaviours to much more subtle, ambiguous, or even covert actions, the latter serving to minimize undesirable social costs.⁶²³

One of the postural strategies that Ming period courtesans often conducted was “leaning against the door” – positioning themselves at the threshold between the street and the brothel and deliberately displaying their charms. One example of this comes from a short story about a monk, Liu Cui, who is reincarnated as a prostitute. Here, Liu mimics the behaviours of the neighbourhood courtesans, using overt seductive strategies to lure the “ogling men” to her door:

这柳翠每日清闲自在，学不出好样儿，见邻妓家有孤老来往，他心中欢喜，也去门首卖俏，引惹子弟们来观看。眉来眼去，渐渐来家宿歇。

⁶²² Andrew Gersick and Robert Kurzban, "Covert sexual signaling: Human flirtation and implications for other social species," *Evolutionary Psychology* 12, no. 3 (2014): 549, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/1474704914012003>.

⁶²³ Gersick and Kurzban, "Covert sexual signaling: Human flirtation and implications for other social species," 549. For research on flirting among primates, see: Maria Botero, "Primates are touched by your concern: Touch, emotion, and social cognition in chimpanzees," in *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Animal Minds*, ed. Kristin Andrews and Jacob Beck (New York: Routledge, 2017), 372-80. Amber D. Walker-Bolton and Joyce A. Parga, "'Stink flirting' in ring-tailed lemurs (*Lemur catta*): Male olfactory displays to females as honest, costly signals," *American Journal of Primatology* 79, no. 12 (2017): 1; 9, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1002/ajp.22724>.

In her idleness, Liu Cui watched clients of the brothels come and go in the neighborhood and, merrily following the examples set by prostitutes all around her, also took to parading her charms at her door. Ogling men soon began to follow her into the house and stay overnight.⁶²⁴ [Shuhui Yang and Yunqing Yang translation]

One encounters a similar example in the lyrics for the song “Standing at the door” (站门 *zhanmen*), included in the song collection *Gua Zhi'er* (Hanging Branches). This song again refers to the standard practice of standing at the threshold to solicit clients, as performed by Ming courtesans and prostitutes:

站门

……管你倚破守门儿磨穿了壁，管你站酸了脚儿闷了腰。眼盼盼巴不能勾俏丽的郎君也，来了，啐！又向别人家进去了。

Standing at the door

Who cares if you lean against the door till it breaks, against the wall till it wears through? Who cares if your feet stand till they're sore and your waist grows fat? Hoping to seduce a pretty gentleman, yet when he comes, bah! He goes into another house.⁶²⁵

Yet sometimes a demure posture is more alluring than intentionally flirting. In the short story “Shan Fulang’s Happy Marriage in Quanzhou”, what courtesan Yang Yu is doing is conspicuously not flirting, but rather showing her demureness, and setting herself apart from her peers by doing so:

只是一件，他终是宦家出身，举止端详。每诣公庭侍宴，呈艺毕，诸妓调笑谑浪，无所不至；杨玉嘿然独立，不妄言笑，有良人风度。

⁶²⁴ Feng Menglong, *Stories Old and New* 古今小说 [1620], 510.

⁶²⁵ Feng Menglong, *Gua zhi'er shan'ge taixia xinze* 挂枝儿 山歌 太霞新奏 [Hanging branches, mountain songs, new music of Taixia], 128.

One thing that distinguished her (courtesan Yang Yu) from the rest of the girls was that, being from a genteel official's family, she was demure and well-mannered. After performing at feasts in a yamen, all the other girls always flirted wantonly with the men, stopping at nothing, while she alone stood by herself in silence, never speaking or laughing improperly, more like a well-bred woman than a courtesan. For this, she won much admiration and respect from all and sundry.⁶²⁶ [Shuhui Yang and Yunqing Yang translation]

This passage indicates that Yang Yu's good family background played a part in the cultivation of her talents and, earlier in the story, it is mentioned that she "was quite literate and was especially skilled in the art of conversation,"⁶²⁷ had learned classics and poetry from childhood, and had been taught singing and dancing by the madam of the brothel. These experiences had contributed to her elegant temperament. It is no surprise that many Ming literati preferred the conduct of better educated courtesans over that of "wanton" singing girls, presumably appreciating opportunities to share knowledge, ideas and values, and thereby experiencing a deeper interpersonal connection.

As the above examples amply illustrate, courtesans would employ a wide range of accessories and textiles to create a suitably alluring affect – and at this point it seems necessary to acknowledge the often-discussed practice of foot-binding 小脚. References to courtesans' bound feet – commonly alluded to as "golden lotus" 金莲 – are abundant in the Ming period literature and, although the binding caused misshapeness and pain, it is apparent that the tiny feet were, nevertheless, widely regarded as beautiful. As Dorothy Ko insightfully points out, while serving to conceal and thereby evoke fascination, the binding also transformed the bare feet into an additional decorative focus for the viewer.⁶²⁸

⁶²⁶ Feng Menglong, *Stories Old and New* 古今小说 [1620], 291.

⁶²⁷ Ibid.

⁶²⁸ Dorothy Ko, "From Ancient Texts to Current Customs: In Search of Footbinding's Origins," in *Cinderella's Sisters: A Revisionist History of Footbinding* (London; Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), 110. Related research on foot binding see: Dorothy Ko, "The Body as Attire: The Shifting Meanings of Footbinding in Seventeenth-Century China," *Journal of Women's History* 8, no. 4 (1997), <https://doi.org/10.1353/jowh.2010.0171>. Ping Wang, *Aching for Beauty: Footbinding in China* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

Accordingly, the Ming period writers often allude to bound feet alongside the other alluring adornments worn by charming, sexually appealing female characters, although explicit descriptions are more common in sex scenes. In the following two examples, the male authors home in on the most alluring attributes of some household courtesans, similarly alluding to the way in which the women's feet are only just visible under the concealment of skirts or trouser ends, stimulating imagination and fantasy:

香袋儿身边低挂，抹胸儿重重纽扣，裤脚儿脏头垂下。往下看，尖趂趂金莲小脚，云头巧缉山牙老鸦。

A sachet of pomander hangs low

at her waist.

The rows of frogs on her bodice

are neatly fastened;

Her ankle leggings, concealed above,

extend below.

The upturned points of her tiny golden lotuses

are just visible;

With a pattern of mountain peaks embroidered

on the tips of their toes.⁶²⁹ [David Roy translation]

.....

富新举目一看，好一双标致的艳婢，都是桃红纱衫.....戴著茉莉花，金簪珠坠，下边微露尖尖小脚，穿著白纱褶裤，大红平底花鞋，不觉那魂灵儿竟钻到他两人身上去了。

Fu Xin looked up and saw a pair of gorgeous servant girls, both dressed in peach

gauze clothes... They wore jasmine flowers, gold hairpins and pearl pendants, their

pointy feet peeping out slightly under their white gauze trousers with pleats, and their

bright red flat shoes embroidered with flowers. Unconsciously, his soul was enchanted

by these two beautiful women.⁶³⁰

⁶²⁹ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume One: The Gathering*, 51.

⁶³⁰ Cao Qujing, *Gu wang yan xia* 姑妄言 下 [Preposterous words, volume 3] (1730), 907.

6.2.2.2 Use of props

Courtesans often employed props during the first phase of courtship, either to highlight or obscure their attractive attributes – the hiding of features communicating an attractive coyness. In certain contexts, courtesans would commonly employ fans, sleeves, or other props to cover their faces when meeting guests for the first time, creating a tantalizing effect while, at the same, demonstrating conventional modesty on meeting a member of the opposite sex. For instance, in the short story “Secretary Qian Leaves Poems on the Swallow Tower”, the courtesan Guan Panpan answers a guest’s questions with sleeves shielding her face, not necessarily because this is her first meeting with the guests and she is shy, but possibly because she is already seeking to secure and develop their interests:

盼盼据卸胡琴，掩袂而言……

Guan Panpan put down the *pipa* and said, shielding her face with her sleeves...⁶³¹

[Shuhui Yang and Yunqing Yang translation]

Ming era courtesans often employed fans, with the round shaped variety being used exclusively by women because of its face-covering function, while the folding type was mainly used by men of letters.⁶³² In addition to their obvious practical use, fans were often used as decoration to augment female attractiveness. Huang E 黄娥 (1498-1569), a Ming poetess, wrote a poem “The song of picking tea” (采茶歌 *caicha ge*), describing a scene of a group of beauties wandering in a garden. In this poem, one of the verses mentions the actions of folding sleeves and waving fans:

⁶³¹ Feng Menglong, *Stories to Caution the World* 警世通言 [1624], 143.

⁶³² Du Xinlin, "Tuanshan wenhua de qiyuan yu fazhan 团扇文化的起源与发展 [The origin and development of the culture of rounded fans]," *Ming jia ming zuo* 名家名作 6 (2021): 65.

一个弄青梅攀折短墙梢，一个蹴起秋千出林杪，一个折回罗袖把做扇儿摇。⁶³³

One pulled down and broke a green plum twig on the wall and played with it, one kicked up the swing until it was higher than the trees, one folded her silken sleeves and waved her fan.

Fans could also be used by Ming dynasty courtesans to cover their faces and convey charm in subtle ways. This ingenious use of the fan is adopted in the entrance scenes of the two courtesan-performers in *Jin Ping Mei*, and the descriptions are alike:

（李桂姐）就用洒金扇儿掩面，佯羞整翠，立在西门庆面前。
(The female singer Li Guijie) hiding her face behind her gold-flecked fan,
While coyly adjusting her hair ornaments,
she took her stand in front of Hsi-men Ch'ing.

.....

（郑爱月）就因洒金扇儿掩著粉脸，坐在旁边。
(The courtesan Zheng Aiyue) concealed her powdered face behind a gold-flecked fan
and sat down next to him.⁶³⁴ [David Roy translation]

6.2.2.3 *Movements*

Unsurprisingly, courtesans typically attributed great care and attention to cultivating elegant and attractive ways of moving, considering every part of their body and the associated movements of fabrics and accessories. For example, in preparation for pouring wine, a courtesan might first seductively preen her hair, then move elegantly closer to the client, lift her arm in such a way that the sleeves sway and tantalizingly briefly reveal a delicate forearm, and then smoothly tilt her delicate wrist to pour the liquid into his cup. In such a way, simple actions would serve to highlight multiple body parts. In the Ming period literature, one

⁶³³ Wang Qi, Hong Bozhao, and Xie Boyang, *Yuan Ming Qing sanqu xuan* 元明清散曲选 [A selection of sanqu from the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties] (Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, 1988), 288.

⁶³⁴ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume Two: The Rivals*, 254-55. Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume Three: The Aphrodisiac*, 459.

encounters references to slender waists with particular frequency, and this is perhaps not surprising given that female waist-hip ratio (slim waist and large hip) is a highly salient indicator of human physical and sexual attractiveness across cultures, suggestive of youth, good health, and fertility.⁶³⁵ In ancient China, the literati's preference for a slim waist was rigid, almost cruel: it should be as thin and soft as a willow twig to match their aesthetic ideals. Accordingly, *Jin Ping Mei* includes a wealth of descriptions praising slender waists: "the handful of her slender waist deserved a painting 瘦腰肢一捻堪描";⁶³⁶ "displaying slender and lithesome waists, they are out of this world 袅娜宫腰迎出尘";⁶³⁷ "her lissome waist reminds one of willow fronds tossed in the wind 嫩腰儿似弄风杨柳".⁶³⁸

Meanwhile, the details of a courtesan's hands would enter the foreground when she played an instrument, so references to beautiful slender fingers abound in descriptions of musical performance. In *Jin Ping Mei*, for example, at one point, we read of a courtesan who "轻舒玉指, 款跨蛟绡 deftly extended her jade fingers [and] gently strummed the silken strings"⁶³⁹ – jade, of course, being especially highly prized as a rare, delicate material. Another similar example, also from *Jin Ping Mei*, reads as follows:

当下桂姐轻舒玉指，顷拨冰弦，唱了一回。

Thereupon, Li Kuei-chieh:

Deftly extended her slender fingers,

Impulsively plucked the icy strings,

and proceeded to sing for a while.⁶⁴⁰ [David Roy translation]

⁶³⁵ Karl Grammer, "Human Courtship Behaviour: Biological Basis and Cognitive Processing," in *The Sociobiology of Sexual and Reproductive Strategies*, ed. A.E. Rasa, C. Vogel, and E. Voland (New York: Chapman and Hall, 1989), 153. Gary L. Brase and Gary Walker, "Male sexual strategies modify ratings of female models with specific waist-to-hip ratios," *Human Nature* 15, no. 2 (2004): 209, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1007/s12110-004-1020-x>. Barnaby J. Dixson et al., "Studies of human physique and sexual attractiveness: Sexual preferences of men and women in China," *American Journal of Human Biology* 19, no. 1 (2007): 88, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1002/ajhb.20584>.

⁶³⁶ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume Four: The Climax*, 7.

⁶³⁷ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume Four: The Climax*, 600.

⁶³⁸ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume Four: The Climax*, 621.

⁶³⁹ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume Two: The Rivals*, 137. Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume Three: The Aphrodisiac*, 91; 435.

⁶⁴⁰ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume Three: The Aphrodisiac*, 235.

Visual representations also attest to this penchant for elegant slender fingers. Figure 6.3, for example, shows a courtesan playing the *pipa* four-stringed lute with her slender pale fingers gracefully positioned close to the strings, while her sleeves collect in elegant folds to reveal her slender left forearm.



Figure 6.3: A female entertainer plays the *pipa*. Her delicate, shapely fingers are an alluring point of focus as she displays her skills.⁶⁴¹

Source: “Ximen Foolishly Presents His New Wife, Mistress Ping, to His Worthless and Bibulous Guests 傻幫閑趨奉鬧華筵（金瓶梅插畫冊）.” The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, 18th century. Album leaf, ink and colour on silk.

⁶⁴¹ *Ximen Foolishly Presents His New Wife, Mistress Ping, to His Worthless and Bibulous Guests 傻幫閑趨奉鬧華筵（金瓶梅插畫冊）*, 18th century. 15 3/8 x 12 3/8 in. (39.0525 x 31.4325 cm). The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. Although this painting was created in the 18th century, it emulates Ming period aesthetics, serving as a fitting illustration for *Jin Ping Mei*.

The alluring movement of fabric – particularly sleeves – appears to have been extensively employed as a seductive tactic, since it frequently appears in literary accounts even before the Ming dynasty. To cite an example, the following poem by Song era literatus Su Shi 苏轼 (960-1279) describes a beautiful courtesan who was skilled at singing and dancing, emphasizing the enchanting movements of her sleeves in the first sentence:

舞袖蹁跹，影摇千尺龙蛇动。歌喉宛转，声撼半天风雨寒。

Her dancing sleeves twist and waver; her shadow moves a thousand feet, like a dragon or snake writhing. A warbling song from her throat, the sounds shaking half of heaven and chilling wind and rain.⁶⁴²

This literary focus on performers' moving sleeves continued throughout the Ming dynasty. In fact, as Peng Xu points out in her research on singing and aesthetics in late-Ming China (2014), sleeve movement appears to have been a near-essential component in Ming era courtesan solo performances.⁶⁴³ The literatus Zhang Fengyi 张凤翼 (1527–1613), for example, describes a post-banquet courtesan performance in the following poem, referencing the way she flings her sleeves “high in the air” while dancing:

吐微音以按节，翥修袖以双迎。

(She) emitted faint sounds, providing a rhythm for her dance,
flinging her long slender sleeves high into the air.⁶⁴⁴

⁶⁴² Zhao Lingshi and Peng Cheng, *Hou jing lu moke huixi xu moke huixi* 侯靖录：墨客挥犀 续墨客挥犀, ed. Fanli Kong, Tang and Song historical notes series, (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2002), 474.

⁶⁴³ Xu, "Lost Sound: Singing, Theatre, and Aesthetics in Late Ming China, 1547-1644," 104.

⁶⁴⁴ Zhang Fengyi, *Chushitang ji* 处实堂集, 1, 8, Peking University Library, Beijing. Related descriptions date back to the Tang dynasty. For example, Bai Juyi's 白居易 poem “Huxuan nü” 胡旋女: “弦鼓一聲雙袖舉 She raises her long sleeves high to the sound of strings and drums.” See: Bai Juyi, *Bai Juyi shiji jiaozhu* 白居易诗集校注 [The collected poems of Bai Juyi, annotated], ed. Xie Siwei, The Essential Series of Classical Chinese

Another example of alluring sleeve movement is found in *Jin Ping Mei*, when the female entertainer Second Sister Shen is aiming to impress the protagonist:

一面轻摇罗袖，款跨蛟绡，顿开喉音，把弦儿放得低低的，弹了个四不应山坡羊。

[She] Lightly flaunted her silken sleeves,
Gently strummed the silken strings, and:
Commencing to sing in full voice,
with her instrument tuned to a low pitch, performed a song to a medley version of the tune “Sheep on the Mountain Slope”.⁶⁴⁵ [David Roy translation]

In addition to the movement of sleeves, other kinds of fabric movement are also commonly referenced in Ming period descriptions of courtesans. For instance, there is the movement of a sash as a courtesan approaches a client. The next example, also drawn from *Jin Ping Mei*, evocatively describes the entrance of four singing girls, each with “sash flying” in a seductive manner:

只见四个唱的一齐进来，向西门庆花枝颭招，绣带飘飘，都插烛也似磕下头去。

Thereupon, each of them:
Like a sprig of blossoms swaying in the breeze,
Sending the pendants of her embroidered sash flying,
Just as though inserting a taper in its holder,
proceeded to kowtow to him.⁶⁴⁶ [David Roy translation]

Literature, (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2006), 305.

⁶⁴⁵ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume Four: The Climax*, 61. I translate the tune name *Shan Po Yang* as “Goats on the Hillside”.

⁶⁴⁶ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume Three: The Aphrodisiac*, 427-28.

6.2.2.4 *Shift in vocal register*

During the first stage, direct dialogue with clients appears to have been relatively rare, and when courtesans used their voice (for instance, when greeting or performing a song), they commonly adopted the strategy of lowering their voices to a quiet subdued tone. This is because soft voices are associated with submissiveness, allowing the individual to convey an attractive, non-threatening image that tends to attract positive engagement rather than repel or provoke.⁶⁴⁷ The following example, from the Ming era short story “Wu Qing Meets Ai’ai by Golden Bright Pond”, includes reference to a typically subdued greeting:

那三个正行之际，恍惚见一妇人，……觑著三个，低声万福。

As they were traveling, they became vaguely aware of the presence of a woman... Casting a coy glance at the three young men, she chanted a greeting in a subdued voice.⁶⁴⁸ [Shuhui Yang and Yunqing Yang translation]

The same principle appears to have been commonly applied when singing. The next two examples describe Ming courtesans lowering their voices when singing for male clients while providing their own instrumental accompaniment. Perhaps these courtesans were singing quietly not merely out of shyness; quiet singing tends to create a peaceful mood while encouraging onlookers to be still and focus keenly on the performer:⁶⁴⁹

这吴银儿不忙不慌，轻舒玉指，款跨蛟绡，把琵琶在于膝上，低低唱了一回柳摇金。

⁶⁴⁷ David Givens, "The nonverbal basis of attraction: Flirtation, courtship, and seduction," *Psychiatry* 41, no. 4 (1978): 346, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/00332747.1978.11023994>.

⁶⁴⁸ Feng Menglong, *Stories to Caution the World* 警世通言 [1624], 524-25.

⁶⁴⁹ Zeitlin also examines the courtesans' strategies for handling the singing voice. See: Zeitlin, "The Pleasures of Print: Illustrated Songbooks from the Late Ming Courtesan World," 41-65.

(The courtesan Wu Yin'er) placed the *pipa* on her knees, and sang in a low voice a song to the tune "The Willows Dangle Their Gold".

.....

那郑春款按银箏，低低唱清江引道.....

(The courtesan Zheng Chun) Gently strummed the silver psaltery,
and sang in a low voice a song to the tune "Clear River Prelude".⁶⁵⁰ [David Roy
translation]

The next example, again from *Jin Ping Mei*, provides a more comprehensive picture of the Ming courtesans' first stage of seduction. Here, the female singer Li Guijie is appearing in front of the male protagonist for the first time, making full use of her body movements, hand movements, and prop (fan), as vehicles for signalling seduction. With a hint of faux coyness, she shows off her charm, seemingly effortlessly:

朝上席不当不正，只磕了一个头，就用洒金扇儿掩面，佯羞整翠，立在西门庆面前。

Facing the seat of honor:

Neither correctly nor precisely,

she performed but a single kowtow, after which:

Hiding her face behind her gold-flecked fan,

While coyly adjusting her hair ornaments,

she took her stand in front of Hsi-men Ch'ing.⁶⁵¹ [David Roy translation]

As was mentioned earlier, the act of covering the face with a fan appears to have often been used as a highly tantalizing seduction strategy, inevitably raising curiosity as to the courtesan's hidden appearance. Meanwhile, in the above description, Li Guijie also draws

⁶⁵⁰ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume Three: The Aphrodisiac*, 91; 496.

⁶⁵¹ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei, Volume Two: The Rivals*, 254-55.

attention to her hands, hair, and beautiful accessories through some strategic preening, further augmenting her allure.

6.2.3 Interaction and Developing Intimacy

If the purpose of the first phase was to captivate the male guest's amorous interests, then from the second phase, the focus turned to deepening the relationship. Here, conversations and interactions would unfold, the courtesan and male customer becoming better acquainted with each other and moving towards intimacy. To facilitate a narrowing of the psychological and emotional distance between the two, the courtesan would elicit moments of physical proximity – for example through deliberate yet casual touches.

6.2.3.1 Conversation

According to behavioural studies scholarship, verbal communication is a necessary, integral component in the courtship process, though other forms of semantic exchange may also be used (including sign language, writing, and so on). However, according to Givens' study (1978), the topic of a conversation itself seems to have limited relevance to the formation of a relationship, at least in the initial stages. Rather the way one communicates is more important than what is actually said.⁶⁵² For heterosexual couples in the early stages of courtship, the connection is said to thrive when women take centre stage and participate prominently in the conversation while men show approval and understanding.⁶⁵³ Givens (1978) suggests that the accompanying courtship invariably increases the frequency of certain

⁶⁵² Givens, "The nonverbal basis of attraction: Flirtation, courtship, and seduction," 351.

⁶⁵³ Daniel A. McFarland, Dan Jurafsky, and Craig Rawlings, "Making the connection: Social bonding in courtship situations," *American Journal of Sociology* 118, no. 6 (2013): 1596, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1086/670240>.

behaviours during conversation – preening, nodding approvingly, stretching, throat clearing and other adjusting actions.⁶⁵⁴ For example, when one partner is stating a point, the other often nods their head in exaggerated agreement to encourage further communication and prevent awkward pauses. Some scholars suggest that conversations in courtship typically show a kind of asymmetry in which the rhythmic give-and-take is determined through negotiation.⁶⁵⁵ When handled sensitively by both parties, conversation tends to play a major role in establishing a benign and harmonious relationship.

For the courtesan-guest relationship also, conversation would have been an integral element in the courtship process, essential for establishing a trusting bond between parties – though in this case, of course, the conversation would often be condensed into a very short period (typically one night) and the bond would often be of a transient, short-term nature. Through conversation, essential information would be exchanged, attractive skills and attributes would be displayed (wit, sensitivity, creativity, and so on), and both parties would gain insights into their emotional states and desires. Conversation was clearly an essential tool of seduction. A typical example of conversation between a courtesan and a guest is shown in Figure 6.4 (below). The picture exhibits a courtesan and male guest sitting at a table, both smiling, with a screen painted with natural scenery behind them. From the rocks and plants, it can be inferred that this is a semi-open garden in a brothel or a private house, with the screen providing a certain degree of concealment.

⁶⁵⁴ Givens, "The nonverbal basis of attraction: Flirtation, courtship, and seduction," 351-52.

⁶⁵⁵ McFarland, Jurafsky, and Rawlings, "Making the connection: Social bonding in courtship situations," 1596.



Figure 6.4: *Tanxin Tu* 谈心图 (A heart-to-heart talk).⁶⁵⁶

Source: Wanyuzi 宛瑜子. *Wu Ji Bai Mei* 吴姬百媚 [Seductive Courtesans in Suzhou Area]. Beijing: Beijing Library Press, 2002.

⁶⁵⁶ Wanyuzi, *Wu ji bai mei* 吴姬百媚 [Seductive courtesans of the Suzhou area].

Conversations between courtesans and guests could obviously occur at any stage of the courtship process, but they were concentrated in the second stage, as an effective means for developing deeper interpersonal understanding and trust and establishing a mood conducive for physical intimacy (stage three). The following passage, from the short fiction “Secretary Qian Leaves Poems on the Swallow Tower”, details the beginning of a conversation between a courtesan and her guests, after she has given a musical performance that has successfully attracted their attention. Here, she is portrayed as not only beautiful and elegant in her movements; she also has advanced conversational skills, which she exploits to ensure that the interaction proceeds smoothly and enjoyably:

遂呼而问曰：“孰氏？”其妓斜抱胡琴，缓移莲步，向前对曰：“贱妾关盼盼也。”……建封曰：“诚如舍人之言，何惜一诗赠之？”乐天曰：“但恐句拙，反污两人之美。”盼盼……言：“妾姿质丑陋，敢烦珠玉？若果不以猥贱见弃，是微躯随雅文不朽，岂胜身后之荣哉。”

They called the *pipa* player forth and asked, “What is your name?”

The *pipa* aslant in her arms, the courtesan took a few delicate, mincing steps forward and replied, “My humble name is Guan Panpan.”

……

“It is indeed as you say,” said Jianfeng. “You will not begrudge composing a poem in her honor?”

“I’m afraid only that my clumsy lines will be an insult to her beauty.”

Guan Panpan……said, “With my uncomely looks, I would not dream of winning a jewel of a poem in my name, but if you, sir, do not find it beneath your dignity to write on such a lowly subject, your immortal poem will lend me some glory after I am gone, however insignificant I am.”⁶⁵⁷ [Shuhui Yang and Yunqing Yang translation]

⁶⁵⁷ Feng Menglong, *Stories to Caution the World* 警世通言 [1624], 143.

In Ming period fiction, we often encounter descriptions of courtesans who first establish a bond with their guest through artful phatic communication⁶⁵⁸ and then open their hearts and express secret feelings and thoughts, often accompanied by the act of crying. Now that private emotions have been revealed, the interpersonal bond has become both special and tight, prompting various commitments, sometimes including marriage. However, the courtesan's expressions of private emotions, thoughts, and promises are often depicted in an ambiguous light: we are not sure how much they express her true sentiments of the moment and how much they are seductive strategies to further ensure continuing loyalty and custom. For instance, in the upcoming example, drawn from the short story "The Oil-Peddler Wins the Queen of Flowers", we do not know to what extent the courtesan Sister Mei's promises to Qin Zhong and her tears are sincere:

.....美娘道：“我要嫁你。”秦重笑道：“小娘子就嫁一万个，也还数不到小可头上，休得取笑，枉自折了小可的食料。”美娘道：“这话实是真心，怎说取笑二字！我自十四岁被妈妈灌醉，梳弄过了。此时便要从良，.....看来去，只有你是个志诚君子，况闻你尚未娶亲。若不嫌我烟花贱质，情愿举案齐眉，白头奉侍。你若不允之时，我就将三尺白罗，死于君前，振白我一片诚心，.....”说罢，呜呜的哭将起来。

“I want to marry you,” said Sister Mei. Qin Zhong laughed. “Even if you marry ten thousand men, I won’t be able to make the list. Don’t tease me. You’ll only make the gods cut my life short.” “I mean it. How can you say I’m teasing you? I was fourteen when the madam got me drunk and made me take my first patron. Ever since then, I’ve wanted to marry and get out of this business..... Of all the men I’ve met, you are the only trustworthy one. I’ve also heard that you are still single. If you don’t look down on me because of my lowly profession, I will be more than happy to serve you as your wife for the rest of my life. If you turn me down, I will strangle myself with a three-foot-long piece of white silk and die at your feet to prove my sincerity.....” So saying, she started to weep.⁶⁵⁹ [Shuhui Yang and Yunqing Yang translation]

⁶⁵⁸ Phatic communion refers to “small talk”, or “a type of speech in which ties of union are created by a mere exchange of words”, defined by Ogden and Richards (1923). Charles Kay Ogden and Ivor Armstrong Richards, *The meaning of meaning: A study of the influence of thought and of the science of symbolism* (New York & London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1923), 315.

⁶⁵⁹ Feng Menglong, *Stories to Awaken the World* 醒世恒言 [1627], 70-71.

Nevertheless, it is well-known that courtesans would often settle into relatively stable long-term relationships with clients – as suggested by both fictional and biographical accounts (such as *Jin Ping Mei*⁶⁶⁰ and *Yingmei An Yiyu* 影梅庵憶語⁶⁶¹). The following example seeks to convey the type of comfortable genuine conversational exchange that might have taken place between such parties:

……公子和十娘坐于舟首。公子道：“自出都门，困守一舱之中，四顾有人，未得畅语。今日独据一舟，更无避忌。且已离塞北，初近江南，宜开怀畅饮，以舒向来抑郁之气。恩卿以为何如？”十娘道：“妾久疏谈笑，亦有此心，郎君言及，足见同志耳。”公子乃携酒具于船首，与十娘铺毡并坐，传杯交盏。

Sitting at the bow with Shiniang by his side, Li said, “Ever since we left the capital, we’ve been cooped up in a cabin with other people all around us and never had a chance for a good talk. Now, with a boat to ourselves, we can finally disregard all scruples. Since we’ve left the north and are approaching the south side of the Yangtze River, let’s drink to our hearts’ content to shake off the gloom of the last few days. What do you say?”

“I was thinking along the same lines, because I, too, miss having a good talk and a good laugh. Your bringing this up shows that we are truly of the same mind.” Li fetched wine utensils, spread out a rug on the bow, and sat down shoulder to shoulder with Shiniang. They began passing the cups back and forth.⁶⁶² [Shuhui Yang and Yunqing Yang translation]

Here, as in so many other contexts, alcoholic drinks are a catalyst for heart-to-heart conversation, and the “shoulder to shoulder” body posture demonstrates the high degree of intimacy between the two as their conversation unfolds in a relaxed atmosphere.

⁶⁶⁰ In *Jin Ping Mei*, the male protagonist Ximen Qing’s second concubine Li Jiao’er was once a courtesan.

⁶⁶¹ In his memoirs *Yingmei An Yiyu* 影梅庵憶語, Mao Xiang 冒襄 recalled the mournful and romantic times he spent with Dong Bai 董白, his concubine, who was once a courtesan. Mao Xiang, “Reminiscences of the Plum Shadows Convent 影梅庵憶語 [1651],” in *Plum Shadows and Plank Bridge: Two Memoirs About Courtesans* (New York Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 2020).

⁶⁶² Feng Menglong, *Stories to Caution the World* 警世通言 [1624], 557.

6.2.3.2 Touching

Touch, or haptic communication, is a common component of courtship and has a powerful emotional impact. Research has shown that touch can contribute to feelings of comfort, warmth, love, and closeness, and is a core component of enhancing human intimacy.⁶⁶³ Because there is a large amount of skin contact involved in sexual intercourse, any brief touch can be symbolic and powerful.⁶⁶⁴ As Judith Hanna explains, in American strip clubs (and various other related contexts), both touching between performers and touching between performer and customer are frequently used to stimulate desire.⁶⁶⁵ In the Ming-era courtship context, touch appears to have been relatively sparse in the early stages, in accordance with social fashion and cultural norms. However, touching clearly did take place, especially prior to the stage of sexual intimacy, because of its ability to rapidly promote lust. For example, Figure 6.5, below, shows a Ming period courtesan drinking and cuddling with a man in the garden.

⁶⁶³ Peter A. Andersen, "Tactile traditions: Cultural differences and similarities in haptic communication," in *The handbook of touch: Neuroscience, behavioral, and health perspectives*, ed. Matthew J. Hertenstein and Sandra J. Weiss (New York: Springer Publishing Company, 2011), 352. Also see: Peter A. Andersen and Laura K. Guerrero, "The bright side of relational communication: Interpersonal warmth as a social emotion," in *Handbook of communication and emotion*, ed. Peter A. Andersen and Laura K. Guerrero (San Diego, CA: Academic Press, 1997). Kory Floyd, *Communicating affection: Interpersonal behavior and social context* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

⁶⁶⁴ Ashley Montagu, *Touching, the human significance of the skin*, 3 ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1986), 103.

⁶⁶⁵ Hanna, "Empowerment: The Art of Seduction in Adult Entertainment Exotic Dance," 203.



Figure 6.5: *Jiaohuan Tu* 交歡圖 (A picture of pleasure).⁶⁶⁶ The words on the right state: “Eleventh in the second class,⁶⁶⁷ Xiang Ruyu. A picture of pleasure”. Xiang Ruyu is the courtesan on the left, sitting together with a guest in a garden, surrounded by rocks, flowing water, and plants. They sit at a banquet table with drink and food, the man holding a wine glass in his left hand and wrapping his right arm around her shoulder. The courtesan sits on his lap with a glass in her left hand. They are both smiling and facing each other.

Source: Wanyuzi 宛瑜子. *Wu Ji Bai Mei* 吳姬百媚 [Seductive Courtesans in Suzhou Area]. Beijing: Beijing Library Press, 2002.

⁶⁶⁶ Wanyuzi, *Wu ji bai mei* 吳姬百媚 [Seductive courtesans of the Suzhou area].

⁶⁶⁷ This is Xiang Ruyu’s ranking among courtesans in the Ming era Suzhou area, as rated by contemporary literati.

The motivating power of touch is amply illustrated by the following extract, taken from the Ming era short story “Yutang Chun Reunites with Her Husband in Her Distress”. Here, the brothel madam urges a courtesan to sit side by side with the male guest as drinks are served:

鸨儿帮衬，教女儿捱著公子肩下坐了，吩咐丫鬟摆酒。……公子开怀乐饮。

To move matters along, the madam made the girl sit down by the young man’s shoulder. She then ordered maids to set out wine……Amid strains of music, the young master was drinking to his heart’s content.⁶⁶⁸ [Shuhui Yang and Yunqing Yang translation]

In this context, shoulder-to-shoulder touch may be regarded as the first step towards physical intimacy. The courtesan’s proximity, her service of pouring wine, and the background musical sound provided by the brothel band all work together to evoke positive feedback – the young guest drinking freely. Before entering the phase of lovemaking, touching is, of course, commonplace behaviour. Even simple acts such as hand touching have potent symbolic effect, psychologically warming up for subsequent sexual acts. Hence, when the above-mentioned story continues, the intimacy intensifies as the courtesan and the guest proceed from “shoulder to shoulder” to “hand in hand”:

公子与玉姐肉手相换，同至香房，只见围屏小桌，果品珍羞，俱已摆设完备。

Hand in hand, the young man and Sister Yu went to the latter’s boudoir, where a small table, shielded by a folding screen, was laid out with fruit and delicacies.⁶⁶⁹ [Shuhui Yang and Yunqing Yang translation]

We also encounter descriptions of the hand-in-hand body mode in the Ming era novel *Gu Wang Yan* 姑妄言 (Preposterous Words):

⁶⁶⁸ Feng Menglong, *Stories to Caution the World* 警世通言 [1624], 381-82.

⁶⁶⁹ Feng Menglong, *Stories to Caution the World* 警世通言 [1624], 382.

随与钱贵携手进房，见房中焚兰热麝，幽雅非常，绣帐锦衾，又富丽至极。⁶⁷⁰

Then, hand in hand, Zhong Sheng (the male client) and Qian Gui (the courtesan) came into the room. Behold: The burning incense heats up the room, setting off the elegant surroundings. The embroidered bed nets and the brocaded quilt are splendid.

Of course, courtesans and their guests would have physically engaged with their clients via a wide variety of contact patterns, extending beyond merely the shoulder and hand regions. Figure 6.6 (below), for example, suggests some other types of interaction that could typically have characterised this stage of courtship. While the other guests are drinking, Ximen Qing (the main protagonist of *Jin Ping Mei*, wearing pastel green clothing) is hugging a courtesan (dressed in red) who sits on his lap. He is feeding her a cup of wine with his left arm around her. Meanwhile, her left hand is lightly wrapped around his wrist, and she looks down shyly while he squints, smiles, and gazes at her face. Their head positions are close, evidencing growing intimacy.

⁶⁷⁰ Cao Qujing, *Gu wang yan xia* 姑妄言 下 [Preposterous words, volume 3] [1730].



Figure 6.6: “Master Ximen Accepts the Service of Courtesan Cinnamon Bud” 西門慶疏籠李桂姐, depicting an indoor banquet scene.⁶⁷¹

Source: “Master Ximen Accepts the Service of Courtesan Cinnamon Bud 西門慶疏籠李桂姐 (金瓶梅插畫冊).” The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, 18th century. Album leaf, ink and colour on silk.

⁶⁷¹ *Master Ximen Accepts the Service of Courtesan Cinnamon Bud* 西門慶疏籠李桂姐 (金瓶梅插畫冊), 18th century. 15 1/4 x 12 1/4 in. (38.735 x 31.115 cm). The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art.

6.2.4 Lovemaking

As intimacy continues to develop, the subsequent stage is an almost indispensable aspect of courtship within the brothel context: lovemaking.

During the Ming period, the flourishing development of vernacular novels and erotic culture led to prevalent descriptions of sexual behaviours in literary accounts. Novels such as *Jin Ping Mei* 金瓶梅 (The Plum in the Golden Vase), *Gu Wang Yan* 姑妄言 (Preposterous Words) and *Rou Pu Tuan* 肉蒲团 (The Carnal Prayer Mat) include extensive explicit depictions of lovemaking. However, such indulgence in carnal desire was not in accord with the mainstream ideological beliefs of the Ming era. To avoid openly contravening doctrinal Confucianism, some Ming writers often utilized literary techniques such as metaphors and condensation of texts (for example, skilfully integrating sexual descriptions into a poem) when portraying sex scenes. In some cases, writers chose to simply omit the details, as exemplified by the example: “They indulged in sexual pleasures the whole night through, and there we shall leave them. 真个男贪女爱，倒凤颠驾，彻夜交情，不在话下。”⁶⁷²

A well-presented example of this approach is found in the short fiction “The Oil-Peddler Wins the Queen of Flowers”, which portrays a romantic encounter between a courtesan and a poor peddler:

云雨之事，其美满更不必言：

一个是足力后生，一个是惯情女子。...一个谢前番帮衬，合今番恩上加恩；一个谢今夜总成，比前夜爱中添爱。红粉妓倾翻粉盒，罗帕留痕。卖油郎打泼油瓶，被窝沾湿。可笑村儿乾折本，作成小子弄风梳。

Their game of clouds and rain was as blissful as could be.

He was a young man in his prime;

She a girl skilful in the art of love...

She thanked him for his patronage last time,

⁶⁷² Feng Menglong, *Stories to Caution the World* 警世通言 [1624], 382.

Which deepened all the more her gratitude now.
He thanked her for obliging him tonight,
Which added to the love he had in his heart.
The courtesan overturned her powder box;
The silk handkerchief was stained.
The oil peddler knocked over his oil jar;
The quilt became wet and soiled.
The village boy who foolishly squandered his money
Now became a figure of romance.⁶⁷³ [Shuhui Yang and Yunqing Yang translation]

In Chinese literature, likening sex to the blissful interplay of clouds and rain is a recurring metaphor (alluded to in the previous chapter). A case in point is the example: “On the couch, they had a brief game of clouds and rain. 两个遂在榻上，草草的云雨一场。”⁶⁷⁴ As relationships progress and partners reach a state of mutual compatibility, they often exhibit a range of caring and affectionate behaviours prior to engaging in sexual activities, akin to the caregiver-infant dynamic.⁶⁷⁵ This passage is laden with expressions of gratitude, care, and love, underscoring the deepened intimacy between the courtesan and her guest-lover, culminating in the act of lovemaking. Symbols such as the overturned powder box and oil jar, along with stained silk handkerchiefs and quilts, serve as vivid metaphors for the aftermath of their intimate encounter.

A second illustrative example is drawn from the fiction “Wu Qing Meets Ai’ai by Golden Bright Pond”, which employs a variety of metaphors to subtly portray a lovemaking scene:

春衫脱下，绣被铺开；酥胸露一朵雪梅，纤足启两弯新月。未开桃蕊，怎禁他浪蝶深偷；半折花心，忍不住狂蜂恣彩。时然粉汗，微喘相偎。

⁶⁷³ Feng Menglong, *Stories to Awaken the World* 醒世恒言 [1627], 69-70.

⁶⁷⁴ Feng Menglong, *Stories Old and New* 古今小说 [1620], 293-94.

⁶⁷⁵ Givens, *Love signals: A practical field guide to the body language of courtship*, 44.

Her blouse taken off, the embroidered quilt spread out;
Her chest a plum blossom against the snow;
Her tiny feet the shape of crescent moons.
The peach blossom bud could hardly withstand
The advances of the amorous butterfly.
The flower pistils were too tender
For the thrusts of the brutal bee;
In each other's arms, they sweated and panted.⁶⁷⁶
[Shuhui Yang and Yunqing Yang translation]

The plum blossom in the snow serves as a metaphor for breasts, in conjunction with the crescent shaped feet and peach blossom bud (representing genitals), symbolizing seduction. Sexual intercourse is metaphorically described through two sentences that liken the act to butterflies and bees investigating pistils. The more explicit indicators of lovemaking are alluded to in the first and last sentences, namely, the discarding of clothing, the unfurled quilts, and the depiction of sweating lovers.

6.2.5 Post-Passion Transition

Givens (1978) observes that social distancing often occurs almost immediately following the completion of sexual intercourse, with participants potentially engaging in separate activities such as sleeping, leaving, or partaking in different pastimes.⁶⁷⁷ However, my examination of Ming dynasty literature reveals quite the opposite: post-coital conversations may persist and take on a more genuine nature in terms of content, possibly accompanied by explicit emotional outpourings such as crying, and intimate skin-to-skin contact may also occur.

⁶⁷⁶ Feng Menglong, *Stories to Caution the World* 警世通言 [1624], 525.

⁶⁷⁷ Givens, "The nonverbal basis of attraction: Flirtation, courtship, and seduction," 353.

The first example depicts a post-passion scene of a courtesan and her guest:

睡到天明，起来梳洗，吃些早饭，两口儿絮絮叨叨，不肯放手。吴小员外焚香设誓，啮臂为盟，那女儿方才掩著脸，笑了进去。

At daybreak, they rose, washed, and combed their hair. With breakfast over, they still had much to say to each other, hating the thought of parting, they held hands and refused to let go. Young Master Wu lit some incense and made a vow, biting his own arms until they bled.⁶⁷⁸ Ai'ai covered her face and went merrily to the interior of the house.⁶⁷⁹ [Shuhui Yang and Yunqing Yang translation]

Evidently, the intimacy between the courtesan Ai'ai and her client did not wane: their conversation persisted, and physical contacts — such as holding hands — remained.

The second example is derived from the novel *Gu Wang Yan*, in which the courtesan Qian Gui confesses to her client. The narrative indicates that they have progressed to the fourth phase of courtship (post-passion transition). Here, they nonverbally indicate their ongoing attraction through physical contact with the head.⁶⁸⁰ With Qian Gui reclining on the guest's arm, she initiates a dialogue. Upon closure of their conversation, an emotional episode of her weeping ensues:

事竣就枕，钱贵枕钟生之臂，悄语道：「妾有心腹一言，欲君见怜，君肯垂听否？」钟生道：「卿之深情，沁我肺腑，有何见教，敢不勉从？」钱贵道：「妾乃钱家亲女，不想隶在乐籍。这接客迎人，原非妾之本意，奈迫于父母之命耳。妾今虽倚门献笑，然自幼间立一誓，愿得遇才貌郎君，定以终身相许。...倘鄙妾下贱烟花，留为妾婢，亦所甘心。君若不从，妾当以一死。自矢此志，决不他移。君能怜念妾否？」言毕，不觉呜呜咽咽，哭将起来。⁶⁸¹

⁶⁷⁸ The act of biting one's arm was a custom among lovers in the Ming dynasty to show loyalty.

⁶⁷⁹ Feng Menglong, *Stories to Caution the World* 警世通言 [1624], 524-25.

⁶⁸⁰ Givens, *Love signals: A practical field guide to the body language of courtship*, 324.

⁶⁸¹ Cao Qujing, *Gu wang yan xia* 姑妄言 下 [Preposterous words, volume 3] [1730], 3.

After lovemaking, Qian Gui rested her head on Zhong Sheng's arm and whispered, "I have some words from my heart to say to you. Would you listen?" Zhong Sheng said, "Your affection has always gladdened my heart and refreshed my mind. If you have anything you want to say, how would I dare not listen?" Qian Gui said, "I am the daughter of the family Qian, yet did not expect to be affiliated with the Household of Music. This lifestyle of pleasing guests is not my original intention, but I follow it under pressure from my parents. Although I now smile and lean against the door, since childhood, I have vowed that if I could meet a man of talent and beauty, I would marry him for a lifetime...If you can take in the indecent me as a concubine or a servant-girl, I will gladly accept. If you don't want to take me in, I can only die to prove my aspiration. Since I have sworn, I will never divert from my oath. Would you have some mercy on me?" After speaking, she began to cry with sobs.

A similar example in *Gu Wang Yan* further substantiates that intimate interaction, including conversation, often transpired in the post-lovemaking phase. Following the acceptance of the courtesan's service and the completion of their sexual engagement, the client Hou Jie and courtesan lie together. Later, Hou Jie initiates a conversation, and when he inquires about her life experience, she cannot hold back her tears:

侯捷上床，那妓者服事他宽衣睡下。.....事竣之后，共枕而卧。侯捷问她，「我听你是北京户口，如何到了这里来？」那女子先还不敢答应，问之再三，她流泪说道.....⁶⁸²

Hou Jie went to bed, and the courtesan took off his clothes and prepared him for sleep...After their lovemaking, they laid together with one pillow. Hou Jie asked her, "I heard that you have a Beijing residence permit, how did you end up here?" At first, the woman didn't dare to answer. After being asked several times, she started to tear up and then said...

⁶⁸² Cao Qujing, *Gu wang yan xia* 姑妄言 下 [Preposterous words, volume 3] [1730], 3.

6.3 Multisensory seduction

Before moving on to my final remarks of this chapter, it is worth highlighting a striking characteristic that typically pervades Ming period descriptions of the courtesans' practices – running through all four courtship phases and featuring prominently in the many examples presented above – namely, the richly multisensory nature of the experience. Typically, we see the courtesans executing their seduction through a wide range of sensory channels in close conjunction, appealing to men's desires in the visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory and tactile realms. As Sara Pink compellingly argues in *Doing Sensory Ethnography* (2009), all experience is inherently multi-sensory in nature and, accordingly, our scholarly enquiries should seek to identify the complete sensory picture rather than homing in a single dimension.⁶⁸³ Fortunately, this is easily accomplished in the case of Ming courtesanship studies: the authors of that period appear to have been highly sensitive to the various sensory components in the brothel's multi-sensory world, pinpointing the most potent sights, sounds, smells, tastes and touches that served to affect the desired responses.

The following example, drawn from the short story “Secretary Qian Leaves Poems on the Swallow Tower”, amply illustrates this rich multi-sensory quality:

当时酒至数巡，食供两套，歌喉少歇，舞袖亦停。忽有一妓，抱胡琴立于筵前，转袖调弦，独奏一曲，纤手斜拈，轻敲慢按。满座清香消酒力，一庭雅韵爽烦襟。须臾弹彻韶音，抱胡琴侍立。

After several rounds of wine and two food courses, the singing came to a halt, and the sleeves of the dancers stopped waving. There emerged in front of the feast table a courtesan holding a *pipa* in her arms. After tuning the instrument, she began playing solo, her dainty fingers gently tapping, pressing, and plucking at the strings. A delicate fragrance dispelled the effects of the wine, and the refined notes of the music dissolved all worries. In a short while, she stopped playing and stepped to one side, her *pipa* in her arms.⁶⁸⁴ [Shuhui Yang and Yunqing Yang translation]

⁶⁸³ Sarah Pink, *Doing Sensory Ethnography* (New York: Sage, 2015), xi.

⁶⁸⁴ Feng Menglong, *Stories to Caution the World* 警世通言 [1624], 143.

In this banquet scene, we encounter diverse sensory delights. The wine and food provide stimulation via taste sensation. The movements of the dancers' bodies and sleeves, and the musician courtesan's dainty fingers appeal to the eye. The sounds of singing and the courtesan's *pipa* playing offer aural stimulation. And, finally, a fragrance, most likely worn by the courtesan herself, also permeates the atmosphere – though another interpretation would be that this is a cross-modal metaphor for the music's effect. By skilfully introducing a wide variety of mutually complementary sensory stimuli, these courtesans seem to be transforming the space into a very special realm – distinct from the contexts typically encountered in life and exerting sufficient influence to transport one away from mundane concerns. As the story goes on, the guest then composes a poem praising the intelligence and beauty of the courtesan:

凤拨金钿砌，檀槽后带垂。
醉娇无气力，风袅牡丹枝。

The phoenix plucks at the bejeweled zither,
With ribbons behind the sandalwood grooves.
In soft breezes, as if tipsy with wine,
The wind flutters the peony on the branch.⁶⁸⁵
[Shuhui Yang and Yunqing Yang translation]

Although this poem may initially seem to have little connection with the courtesan, the phoenix is in fact a metaphor for the talented courtesan herself, symbolizing luxury, nobility and rarity. Here, the “phoenix” plucks the jewel-encrusted zither to create an enchanting sound, while the sandalwood and peony contribute scent and the soft breeze brings a tactile sensation. In keeping with the preceding banquet scene, wine is also mentioned here, stimulating taste sensations and tipsiness.

⁶⁸⁵ Feng Menglong, *Stories to Caution the World* 警世通言 [1624], 143.

6.4 Summary

This chapter has sought to identify, classify, and explicate the range of seduction strategies that Ming era courtesans employed. Given the nature of the courtesan profession, it is not surprising that these women devoted a great deal of care and time to the cultivation of seductively appealing qualities. Extending beyond skilfully selecting clothing and accessories to complement their physical attributes, there was clearly much to benefit from developing skills in conversation and the arts, and from learning how to use their voices and bodies to communicate intentions and guide interaction in particular directions. Indeed, the development of strong skills in reading and applying diverse forms of seductive signalling must have been critically important to them, being directly linked to their professional success. Such skills would have enabled them to surpass the competition, navigate difficult conflict-ridden interactions, and successfully manipulate others' emotions in ways that would benefit them personally – these clearly being central areas of concern within the realm of courtesanship, as they are in courtship more generally.⁶⁸⁶

As demonstrated above, Ming period writers tended to depict the courtesans' behaviour as carefully designed and premeditated down to the smallest detail, and furthermore, as almost always geared towards seductive ends. This surely reflected the male authors' own interpretations and their tendency to conform to literary stereotypes. However, in reality, the courtesans would often have been able to carry out their interactions with very little conscious calculation. After years of immersion in their profession, they would often have been able to rely on well-honed intuition and behavioural patterns that had become almost hard-wired into their beings through repetition. Each different courtesan would also have developed their own individual persona, characterized by certain attire and make-up, vocal attributes, skills, and sets of preferred seductive strategies. The distinctiveness of each courtesans' charms is, indeed, often highlighted in Ming period sources, such as the forementioned *Wu Ji Bai Mei* 吳姬百媚, the volume of “prostitutes” in Wang Shizhen's 王

⁶⁸⁶ See Buss's work (2016). Buss, *The Evolution of Desire: Strategies of Human Mating*.

世贞 novel *Yan Yi Bian* 艳异编 (A Collection of Luscious and Indulgent Love Affairs),⁶⁸⁷ and *Ban Qiao Za Ji* 板桥杂记 (Miscellaneous Records of the Plank Bridge) by Yu Huai 余怀.⁶⁸⁸ So, while some courtesans may have been notably Machiavellian in their approach, others would have thrived on account of contrary qualities, such as sincerity and outspokenness. It is also worth noting that each courtesan would surely have developed a complex multi-faceted nature, as people generally do. As narratives like *Jin Ping Mei* suggest, each courtesan would have adapted her conduct and strategies according to the needs of the moment. Evidently, there remains much more to uncover in this field of enquiry, through consulting other Ming period sources while also extending the coverage to consider subsequent seduction phases (love making and the post-passion transition back to mundane interaction).

To explore this topic, I have adopted an interdisciplinary approach, applying insights gleaned from the field of behavioural studies to shed light on Ming period courtesanship practices as described in novels, poems, and other documents. Consulting the former scholarship has greatly aided the process of identifying and interpreting the courtesans' strategies, and it is intriguing to see how, again and again, the key behaviours identified by scholars like Albert Schefflen, Desmond Morris, David Buss and Judith Hanna are evocatively depicted in the old documents. Evidently, as behavioural scholarship postulates, much courtship behaviour is near-universal in its reach, spanning diverse cultures and periods. In Ming period China, seduction was achieved through preening, posture preparation, flirtatious emphasis of certain body parts, suggestive dialogue, use of touch, and a wide variety of other methods. One might expect to see a wealth of parallel practices pervading other courtesan cultures also, although this hypothesis would need to be substantiated through equivalent interdisciplinary research.

⁶⁸⁷ Wang Yanzhou, *Yan yi bian* 艳异编 [A collection of luscious and indulgent love affairs] [1571-1596].

⁶⁸⁸ Yu Huai, "Miscellaneous Records of the Plank Bridge 板桥杂记 [1693]".

7. Conclusions

This dissertation has sought to deepen and enhance our scholarly understanding of the vibrant courtesan culture that flourished during the Ming dynasty, spanning from the mid-fourteenth to mid-seventeenth centuries (1368-1644), with a particular focus on the late Ming time (1572-1644). Like many other studies, it has mainly focused on courtesan practices in the Jiangnan region, particularly in Suzhou and Nanjing – a region well-documented for its thriving entertainment industry. Meanwhile, also in common with other studies, it has inevitably relied heavily on primary sources from the period. Nevertheless, in each of the preceding chapters, I have applied novel research methods to generate fresh insights into a number of core areas in this field of study: the courtesans' song repertoire (in Chapter 2); the diverse contexts the courtesans performed in, and their ways of interacting with others during performance events (Chapter 3); the emotional states addressed through the courtesans' artistry (Chapter 4); the sound symbols pervading the courtesans' realms, as represented in *Jin Ping Mei* (Chapter 5); and, lastly, the courtesans' manifold strategies of seduction (Chapter 6).

At the outset of my study, in Chapter 2, I have centred my investigation on the courtesans' repertoire, beginning with an overview of the two main types of song that they focused their attentions on: *sanqu* and *xiaoqu*. This introductory exploration has served to delineate the genres' stylistic characteristics, differences, and interrelations, and form a foundational understanding before moving onto the chapter's centrepiece – a systematic, comprehensive study of *Wu Ji Bai Mei* 吴姬百媚 (Seductive Courtesans of the Suzhou Area). I have selected *Wu Ji Bai Mei* as the central focus for this study because it has, somewhat inexplicably, been largely overlooked by contemporary scholars, despite being something of a treasure trove: it clearly pertains directly to courtesanship in Suzhou (a vital hub of Ming era courtesan culture) and brings together a huge range of poems that lucidly reveal the core preoccupations and conventions of the time, in terms of aesthetics, themes, styles, and poetic structures.

Inspired by Ōki and Santangelo’s methodology,⁶⁸⁹ I have then undertaken a meticulous, systematic analysis of the song texts in *Wu Ji Bai Mei* – creating original translations of them, examining the richly varied forms and structures employed, showing how they relate to standard models of the time, and identifying the prevailing themes and sentiments. Rather than cherry pick a small selection from the collection (which would inevitably introduce profound bias into the study), I have chosen to examine all the song texts comprehensively and thoroughly, thus offering a broader perspective. By doing so, I have aimed to provide a more objective portrayal of Ming courtesan culture, and the aesthetic ideals of the contemporaneous literati. In any case, it is crucial to acknowledge that these songs have already undergone a filtering selection process, specifically by the compilers themselves during the collection process: as the arbiters of taste, it was they who evaluated the songs, outlined a framework for the ideals of culture and courtesanship, and picked out the best-aligning songs.

In my analysis of *Wu Ji Bai Mei*’s songs, my primary focus has been on understanding the Ming period literati’s ideals regarding courtesan appearance, behaviour, and artistry. After all, the collection is an almost unsurpassable resource for any scholar wishing to understand such matters, standing out as one of the very few surviving, intact collections of literati poetry associated with the “flower tasting” courtesan evaluation activity. In this regard, the anthology’s preface has proved invaluable for guiding my enquiry, stressing as it does the central ideal of “seductiveness” (媚 *mei*), which is also alluded to in the anthology’s title itself: “a hundred seductiveness-es”, *bai mei* 百媚. Here, the editor further posits that the highest level of seductiveness is “charm out of naturalness” (天然色韵 *tianran seyun*) or “natural charm”, which is evidently intimately tied to the ideal of “genuineness” (真 *zhen*), so highly valued by the Ming literati. As my analysis demonstrates, the poems themselves echo these values, with any evidence of artifice or un-charming behaviour being roundly criticised. At the same time, the poems clearly indicate the literati’s primary objective of cultivating and presenting themselves as the ultimate connoisseurs of beauty: each poem vividly depicts a

⁶⁸⁹ Ōki and Santangelo, *Shan'ge, the 'Mountain Songs': Love Songs in Ming China*, 65-289.

courtesan's appearance, behaviour and talents, and homes in on (and vigorously celebrates) her finest attributes. Meanwhile, it is striking how often the poems devote their attention to evaluating the courtesans' vocal qualities, performance skills, and the emotions addressed therein, highlighting the literati's conviction that music is indeed one of the most powerful tools of seduction. My analysis of *Wu Ji Bai Mei* also systematically identified and cross-compared the structures of all the poems, considering the number of characters in each line and the rhyme schemes employed, and revealing a huge array of forms. Here, I discovered that certain named tunes (*qupai*) appear to have been associated with inflexible structure in the poets' minds, since all the songs created for them strictly adhere to the exact same model. Meanwhile, other named tunes seem to have been associated with structural flexibility, since the songs set to them vary (to differing degrees) in the number of characters per line and their rhyme schemes. This is a significant original finding, worthy of further investigation in future studies. Finally, in this same chapter, I observed that *Wu Ji Bai Mei*'s songs appear to centre on the same basic emotions which prevail throughout courtesan-related poetry from the period (as explored in Chapter 4), with the sole exception that anger is only weakly expressed. In these texts, which express admiration and concern for the courtesans, we encounter love, joy, sadness and anxiousness.

Chapter 3 has then applied a related broad perspective approach to reveal the true extent of the courtesans' involvement in musical activities during the Ming period, identifying the full range of contexts they made music in and the different types of interaction that characterised those music-making scenarios. Again, to establish a firm foundation for my study, I have preceded my central exploration by delving into the musical landscape of the Ming dynasty, detailing the two primary styles – northern and southern *qu* – and elucidating the ascendancy of southern *qu* as the dominant musical form during this period. Additionally, during this initial step, I have placed appropriate emphasis on investigating the Ming literati's fervour for “pure singing”, which placed extreme emphasis on the singing voice and its abilities to convey and augment the emotions imbedded in song texts.

The main body of Chapter 3 then presented my systematic, comprehensive appraisal of the Ming courtesans' performance practices, drawing from a diverse array of sources, including woodblock paintings, drama script illustrations, and other visual representations.

Here, I have advanced a novel system of categorisation, identifying four main fields of performance activity, which vary substantially in both their scale and their degree of public accessibility: large public gatherings, private gatherings for invited participants, intimate gatherings with limited attendees, and solitary music-making by courtesans. This meticulous survey and systematic categorization constitutes a significant original contribution to existing scholarship: while Xu Rui's 2010 article summarises three types of context in which Ming and Qing era courtesans performed in the Qinhuai valley,⁶⁹⁰ my work is more specific in scope (focusing only on Ming courtesans) and identifies and elucidates diverse other types of musical involvement. Notably, this chapter has also examined a wide range of Ming period depictions of music-making scenarios – another significant contribution, given that these images (which so often crystallise prevailing ideals in performance practice), have not been rigorously examined in previous research. Furthermore, to inform my analysis of the interpersonal dynamics prevailing in the various performance contexts, I have innovatively applied Thomas Turino's analytical lens (identifying critical differences between participatory and presentational forms) – a practice unprecedented in Ming era courtesanship-related scholarship.⁶⁹¹ The materials presented and analysed in this chapter have demonstrated that the courtesans had to be highly adaptable and versatile in their artistry, sufficiently adhering to the typical performance conventions of particular contexts (be they more presentational or participative in nature), while effectively responding to their hosts' needs and desires.

Finally, another noteworthy aspect of this chapter (Chapter 3) is its consideration of solitary music-making within the Ming courtesans' realm. While considerable attention has been devoted to the courtesans' activities in group scenarios (and especially private parties), their solitary music-making has remained a rather overlooked facet of their lives, despite so many song texts, works of fiction, and illustrations offering vivid depictions of it. Here, I argue that such representations were not based solely in the literati authors' fantasy-laden imaginations. Rather, acknowledging that these female artists were so often "on display", I

⁶⁹⁰ Xu Rui, "Ming Qing qinhuai qinglou yueji de yinyue huodong 明清秦淮青楼乐妓的音乐活动 [The musical activities of courtesans in the Ming and Qing dynasty Qinghuai brothels]," *Huangzhong* 黄钟, no. 4 (2010): 69-82.

⁶⁹¹ Turino, *Music as social life: The politics of participation*, 25-26.

think it highly likely that they did indeed make good use of their solitude by making music – to hone their skills, address their inner worlds, relish some tranquillity and freedom, and restore themselves to a more balanced state.

This dissertation has subsequently delved deeply into the realm of emotions (in Chapter 4), fully recognising that perceiving, expressing, guiding, and understanding emotion was a fundamental preoccupation for the courtesans and their clients – as amply demonstrated by the incessant references to feelings pervading so many Ming period sources. Here, I commence with a thorough examination of the central concept of *qing* (emotion), drawing from diverse old sources to shed light on how the Ming literati understood *qing*'s essential nature and scope, and consulting more recent studies to investigate interconnections with other emotion-related theories. My work has then advanced a meticulous analysis of musical texts, encompassing both *sanqu* (stand-alone songs) and *xiaoqu* (popular songs) and striving to understand their emotional content. Here, Patrik Juslin and Petri Laukka's influential 2003 study on music and emotion has served as a valuable foundational reference,⁶⁹² and I have found that their central observation – namely, that music is essentially concerned with the expression and perception of five basic emotions (love, joy, sadness, anxiousness, and anger) – applies well to the Ming period songs. My analysis has recognized that, of course, the texts tend to explore various secondary emotions also, and sometimes also ambiguous states and mixed emotions. Based on my examination of the song lyrics, this chapter has also advanced a new way of categorizing the numerous love-related texts, specifically in accordance with what I discern to be a natural progression of love between courtesans and their client-lovers, proceeding through the following discrete stages: the first encounter, unrequited love, falling in love, separation, longing and waiting, and complaining and resenting. Through presenting and analysing a wealth of examples (most of which have been newly translated for the purpose), I have further illuminated how these distinct stages and the emotions therein were explored via the medium of song texts and poetry. Towards the conclusion of the chapter, again, I apply insights from modern scholarship (primarily from the field of music

⁶⁹² Juslin and Laukka, "Communication of emotions in vocal expression and music performance: Different channels, same code?." See also: Juslin, *Musical emotions explained: Unlocking the secrets of musical affect*.

psychology) to shed new light on the processes of interpersonal emotional communication reported to have taken place between courtesans and their patrons – proposing that the establishment of empathy was a fundamental objective, and identifying the various methods applied by the courtesans in their efforts to achieve it. Another significant contribution advanced within this chapter is my exploration of three specific emotion-related phenomena that are often alluded to in the Ming period sources but overlooked within previous scholarship, namely: accounts of peak experiences pertaining to musical performance, the use of hyperbolic visual imagery to highlight music's impacts, and the crucial roles played by episodic memory in determining listeners' responses.

Chapter 5 has delved deeper into the emotional dimension, drawing inspiration from Steven Feld's 1982 study.⁶⁹³ In this chapter, I have investigated the living and performing spaces of courtesans through the lens of soundscape study, employing the Ming dynasty novel *Jin Ping Mei* as a case study. As in previous chapters, I have applied a systematic, thorough, and comprehensive approach, in this case, striving to identify and categorise the full range of symbolic sounds mentioned in the novel, and elucidate their associations with certain ideas and sentiments. Although, to the best of my knowledge, no other academic in the field of Ming courtesan studies has previously applied such a soundscape perspective to an ancient literary text, I have found it to be helpful: through these means, one can begin to reconstruct the sonic environment in which the courtesans lived and, perhaps more importantly, pinpoint the sonic elements held to be particularly meaningful – pervasive symbolic tropes in literature and in life (with the same symbols also appearing prevalently in the lyrics sung by courtesans).

From the outset, *Jin Ping Mei* has seemed like an ideal text to focus on for my study of soundscapes and sound symbolism. The novel's historical context (Ming dynasty) and the primary social groups it portrays (upper-middle-class merchant families, courtesans, and other female entertainers) closely align with the focus of the current research. At the same time, the novel is unusually richly detailed in its descriptions of the sensory worlds inhabited by the

⁶⁹³ Feld, *Sound and Sentiment: Birds, Weeping, Poetics, and Song in Kaluli Expression*.

Ming courtesans. Although many of the sounds it mentions may not have had direct associations with the courtesans' musical activities, they are nevertheless intricately woven into the sonic ambiance where the courtesans resided and, therefore, I include them within my appraisal. Furthermore, the novel itself strongly advances a very particular understanding, specifically, that even the most insignificant-seeming details in the sonic realm can be deeply impactful as sonic symbols, and, crucially, this same key observation is also propounded by luminaries within the field of soundscape studies. In the context of *Jin Ping Mei*, the various sounds made by birds, animals, and the natural elements and the diverse human sounds pervading the courtesans' performance arenas are almost invariably presented as being symbolically meaningful, crucially pertaining to the all-important emotional inner worlds of the narrative's protagonists. Accordingly, I argue that my approach to investigating sound symbolism both conforms to and validates the Ming era literati's own attitudes towards sound and emotion. Indeed, the literary depictions pervading *Jin Ping Mei* hint at a major preoccupation amongst the literati (also evidenced in other texts such as *Wu Ji Bai Mei*): they wished to cultivate and depict themselves as hyper-sensitive connoisseurs of emotion. As such, this chapter's discussion also resonates with themes addressed in Chapter 4 concerning the Ming literati's obsession with *qing*.

Finally, Chapter 6 has illuminated the significance of seduction skills for the Ming era courtesans and pinpointed the wide range of seductive strategies that they commonly deployed in order to achieve desired ends. Here, again, I have applied an innovative interdisciplinary approach, drawing extensively from courtship and behavioural studies to assist my analysis of how the female entertainers' seduction strategies are portrayed in various Ming texts and drawings.

Before embarking on my examination of the strategies themselves, Chapter 6 began by establishing a firm conceptual foundation – defining the key terms of courtship and seduction (as understood in the west), elucidating the Ming literati's own conceptualisations in these areas, and revisiting the prevailing aesthetic ideals relating to feminine beauty at that time. For the analysis itself, I have then advanced a four-stage interpretation of the overall courtship process, encompassing: attention-catching, interaction and intimacy development, lovemaking, and post-passion phases. Meanwhile, I have identified a few practices –

preening, musical performance, and drinking – typically depicted as having been interspersed throughout multiple phases. Drawing on a wide range of sources, I have then pieced together what appears to be the first ever systematic exploration of the courtesans’ methods of seduction, detailing how they artfully decorated and adorned themselves, selected clothing ideally suited for highlighting particular body parts and movements, skilfully employed a variety of seductive props, cultivated advanced skills at discerning prevailing emotions and moods, martialled a variety of conversational and artistic abilities to their advantage, and executed various vocal and bodily cues to convey intentions and guide interactions. This enquiry has led me to conclude that a mastery of seduction-signalling skills was nothing less than indispensable for a successful career as a courtesan, especially in the highly competitive environment in which they were embedded.

In this way, then, the five central chapters of this dissertation have each advanced a number of significant new contributions to the fascinating field of Ming courtesanship studies. At the same time, of course, much work remains to be done. Relating to this current work, several lines of enquiry stand out for me as especially worthy of pursuit. Firstly, building on existing research into the literati’s “flower tasting” practice (addressed in Chapter 2), there is ample scope for future research to elucidate the correlation between the flower names of courtesans and the personas they developed and expressed through performance (as eulogized in poems and song texts), here noting that performance in that context was not limited solely to musical performance, but also encompassed the courtesans’ presentation of self in daily tasks and when interacting with clients.⁶⁹⁴ I hypothesise that there should be a clear relationship between the courtesans’ flower names and their personas, as flower names were generally given by literati patrons based on the women’s unique attributes (appearances, personalities, and special skills). Secondly, it would surely be beneficial to build upon my study of *Jin Ping Mei*’s representation of Ming period soundscapes and sound symbolism by

⁶⁹⁴ Here, again, an interdisciplinary approach would be beneficial, perhaps applying and building upon Erving Goffman’s psycho-sociological theories. See, for example, Erving Goffman, “The presentation of self in everyday life,” in *Social Theory Re-Wired* (New York: Routledge, 2016). Or, theories relating to the construction and expression of persona in the field of popular music studies, for example, Allan F. Moore, *Song means: Analysing and interpreting recorded popular song* (London: Routledge, 2016).

applying the same analytical lens to other Ming period fiction. In this way, it would be possible to develop a still more detailed and comprehensive picture of the sound-worlds inhabited by the courtesans at that time. Thirdly, I propose that future researchers could attempt some historical reconstruction of the courtesans' music-making, drawing from Ming period descriptions and theories about the proper ways for "realising tunes" (*duqu* 度曲) in relation to the linguistic tones, rhythms, and rhymes of song texts, and in accordance with prescribed aesthetic norms (as discussed in Chapter 2). However, it is worth acknowledging the profound obstacles that such a study would inevitably encounter: most significantly, only a small number of the *qupai* 曲牌 (literally "tune names" or "tune labels") mentioned in Ming period sources are recorded in musical notations, and those notations invariably date from many years after the Ming period, presumably after extensive evolutions had occurred in melodic content. Nevertheless, I hypothesise that such a project could still yield some fascinating insights into how the courtesans may have treated melodies in their ceaseless endeavours to charm their listeners.

Appendix

Notes:

- At the top of the tabulated representations, the typical structure for the song form is given, as commonly encountered in historical sources; this information is drawn from *Zhongguo quxue da cidian* 中国曲学大辞典 (Dictionary of Chinese *Qu* Study).
- The numbers indicate the number of characters contained in each line.
- △ means the line should rhyme; ▲ means the line can rhyme or not.
- Blue highlighting indicates that a line is inconsistent with the typical rhyme scheme and sentence pattern for the tune.
- (Re) denotes a reiterative line that should be repeated exactly in the next line.

Gua Zhi'er 挂枝儿 (Hanging Branches)

- *Xiaoqu* (popular songs).
- Frequency: 15
- Sentiments: humorous and teasing; melancholy; lovesickness.

	Form										First lines (and other significant lines)	
1.	6	4	6	3	3	6	5	5	10(ye)	10	<兴 Excitement>	论当今、谁似您，凭般高兴；无心中、常把人，意见倾。Of today's people, who is as happy as you? Inadvertently, you often listen to people's opinions.
2.	6	4	6	4	6	6	5	5	10(ye)	8	<俏 Prettiness>	不爱你俏身躯，轻如舞燕；却爱你俏眼儿，灵变多般。 I don't love your pretty body, as light as a dancing swallow, but I love your dainty eyes, clear and unwearied.

3.	6	4	6	5	6	4	5	5	8(ye)	7	<伴 Accompaniment> 问娘行回甚的，伴娘厮○。 ⁶⁹⁵ Asking the woman, ... (The writing thereafter is blurred and impossible to read).
4.	6	4	6	4	6	4	5	5	9(ye)	10	<做 Doing> 想当时，是那个与娘同做；做出来，却是个乖巧[的]青娥。Thinking about the past, (and wondering) who did it with her mother, so when they were done, such a lovely girl came out.
5.	6	4	6	4	5	5	5	5	8(ye)	9	<娇 Charm> 天生你恁般娇，使人心醉；娇声儿娇态儿，千娇百媚。 You were born so charming, making people fascinated. Sweet voices and coquettish postures, you have a thousand charms.
6.	6	4	6	4	6	4	5	5	8(ye)	8	<态 Looks> 论天工原不把，态儿生定；却被你细心儿，巧样生情。 Talking about you as a work of nature, (your) natural appearance lacks striking characteristics. But you carefully breed <i>qing</i> in your clever face.
7.	6	4	6	4	6	4	5	5	7(ye)	7	<闪 Dodge> 问娇娃回甚的，是人留意；未到手神魂乱，怎禁相思。 Ask the charming girl what she's up to, for she always captures people's attentions. Before she's in your grasp, your soul is in turmoil, unable to resist yearning for her.
8.	6	4	6	4	6	4	7	5	5(ye)	6	<梦 Dream> 梦儿里、也不住，来了就去；去便玄、怎负得，梦里相知。 Not lingering in dreams, but coming and going. After departing, all became mystery. How to endure that we once knew each other in our dreams?
9.	6	5	6	5	6	4	6	6	10(ye)	9	<谈心 A heart-to-heart talk> 说心儿话心儿、心儿在腹内；内是心外是腹，似两样东西。Talking about the heart and discussing the heart, the heart is within the belly. The heart is on the inside, and the belly on the outside, like two things.
10.	6	4	6	4	3	5	7	7	9(ye)	11	<在行 Good at it> 论娘行本是个，青楼娇艳；恨年来喜清静，压脱凡尘。 Talking about this woman, once so pretty in the brothel. Pitifully, seeking peace and quiet all

⁶⁹⁵ “○” means that the original text is vague and unrecognisable.

											these years, out of the mundane world.
11. 6	4	6	4	6	4	5	5	12(ye)	9	<爱 Love>	爱玉人不爱你、恁儿清瘦；爱玉人不爱你、意儿温存。 Loving this jade person who doesn't love you, with her skinny looks. Loving this jade person who doesn't love you, with her gentle affections.
12. 6	4	6	4	6	4	6	6	12(ye)	6	<笑 Smile>	见他时你也笑、我也好笑；你问我我问你、怎笑不了。 You laugh when you see him, and I laugh too. You ask me, and I ask you, why can't we stop laughing?
13. 6	4	6	4	6	4	7	7	8(ye)	8	<菱花 Water chestnut flower>	种菱花采菱花，菱花自笑；你种我、你采我，莫用相嘲。 Planting water chestnut and picking water chestnut, the water chestnut laughs to itself; you plant me, and you pick me, so don't laugh at me.
14. 6	4	6	4	6	4	6	6	9(ye)	9	<好 Goodness>	好姐姐，整日里门前来站；南边来北边去、都是心肝。 Good sister, standing before the door all day. The people who come from south and north, all her darlings.
15. 6	4	6	4	6	4	6	6	10(ye)	7	<小 Smallness>	休说他年纪小、无情无趣；一湾湾小脚儿、便惹相思。 Don't say she's too young to be interesting, for her curved little feet can provoke longing.

There are more *Gua Zhi'er* 挂枝儿 songs in *Wu Ji Bai Mei* than any other, suggesting the popularity of this tune in Suzhou. The structure is relatively fixed but, as in most popular songs, the rhyme requirements are relatively loose. Its features include:

- a) 10 lines, with a degree of flexibility regarding character number;
- b) The penultimate line is sometimes significantly longer than the others, including padding characters and ending with the word “也 *ye* (also)”.

A complete example is presented here, selected from the above:

闪 Dodge

问娇娃回甚的，是人留意。未到手神魂乱，怎禁相思。到手时相思罢，随他自去。[好似]飘花随上下，流水绕东西。姐姐你若是闪了人儿也，人到底也闪了你。

Ask the charming girl what she's up to, for she always captures people's attentions. Before she's in your grasp, your soul is in turmoil, unable to resist yearning for her. Once she's yours, the yearning ceases, and you let her be. [Just like] flowers floating up and down, and the river water flowing east and west. Sister, if you dodge someone, in the end, someone will also dodge you.

Wu Ge 吴歌 • Shi Qiang 时腔 (Wu Songs: Songs of the Time)

- *Xiaoqu* (popular songs).
- Frequency: 14
- Sentiments: humorous; praising.

- | | | | | | | | |
|-----|----|----|---|----|----|--|--|
| 1. | 7 | 10 | 5 | 10 | 10 | 姐儿生来高又高...This sister was born so very tall...; doesn't know how to pretend; a star in the sky fell to this world. | |
| 2. | 9 | 10 | 5 | 10 | 7 | 姐儿生来忒介弗凑巧...This sister was born very unlucky. | |
| 3. | 7 | 7 | 5 | 10 | 7 | 7 | 姐儿生来像桃花....This sister was born like peach blossoms. |
| 4. | 7 | 7 | 5 | 11 | 9 | 寿寿原来弗是人..... Shou Shou turns out not to be mortal, | |
| 5. | 11 | 11 | 5 | 12 | 9 | 7 | 郎抱姐儿好像沙里去淘金...A man holds this sister as if panning for gold in the sand. |
| 6. | 8 | 7 | 5 | 9 | 10 | 姐儿生来好像鹞子...This sister was born like a kite. | |
| 7. | 7 | 7 | 5 | 12 | 6 | 9 | 姐儿生来像提琴，提上提下作娇声. This sister was born like a fiddle, producing a tender sound as she moves up and down |
| 8. | 7 | 12 | 5 | 12 | 11 | 姐儿生来妖又娆.....This sister was born to be enchanting and voluptuous. | |
| 9. | 7 | 9 | 5 | 11 | 13 | 姐儿生来甚妖娆...This sister was born to be enchanting. | |
| 10. | 11 | 10 | 5 | 9 | 9 | 姐儿生来好像锦棉袄...This sister was born like a brocade jacket. | |
| 11. | 8 | 9 | 5 | 11 | 13 | 姐儿好像个三白酒...This sister is like a triple white liquor. | |
| 12. | 7 | 10 | 5 | 12 | 11 | 姐儿生来娇又娇...This sister was born sweet and dainty. | |
| 13. | 7 | 9 | 5 | 7 | 10 | 姐儿生来貌超群...This sister was born with a superior look | |
| 14. | 9 | 10 | 4 | 9 | 9 | 姐儿生来一双好眼睛.....This sister was born with good eyes. | |

Observed characteristics and summary:

Also belonging to the category of *xiaoqu*, these *Wu Ge* 吴歌 • *Shi Qiang* 时腔 lyrics similarly lack strict metrical and rhyme requirements.

However, certain norms can still be observed, with the following characteristics prevailing:

- a) Usually five lines, or occasionally six;
- b) The first line usually employs the fixed formulation “姐儿生来 This sister was born...”;
- c) The third line employs a fixed formulation, either “郎道姐儿呀 The man said, ah, sister...” or “姐道我郎呀 This sister said, ah my man”;
- d) The contents usually compare a courtesan to an object, glorifying some of her qualities.

Here, I present the complete lyrics for one song, exemplifying some typical characteristics:

寿寿原来弗是人，再是天上月孛星。姐道我郎呀，你没道是未雨落时星先动，云收雨散依旧一天星。

Shou Shou turns out not to be a mortal, but the moon and the stars in the heavenly sky.

This sister said, ah my man, you don't know that the stars move first before the rain falls,

After the clouds gather and the rain dissipates, the sky will still be full of stars.

Huzhou Shan'ge 湖州山歌 • Shi Qiang 时腔 (Mountain Songs of the Hu Area: Songs of the Time)

- *Xiaoqu* (popular songs).
- Frequency: 4
- Sentiments: humorous, love.

1.	6	5	6	5	6	5	5	6	奴上子个床来，郎上子个床。	I get on the bed, and my man gets on the bed....
2.	6	5	5	5	5	7	7	5	姐有子个心来，郎有子个心。	This sister has a heart, and that man has a heart.
3.	5	5	6	5	5	4	11		姐有子心来，郎有子个心。	This sister has a heart, and that man has a heart.
4.	6	5	4	5	6	7	6	7	奴上子个床来，郎上子个床， 一把骨头，吓坏子个郎。	I come to the bed, and my man comes to the bed; a handful of bones freaking out my man.

Huzhou Shan'ge 湖州山歌 • *Shi Qiang* 时腔 exhibit the following observable norms:

- Usually eight lines;
- The second and fourth lines always contain five characters;
- A characteristic fixed formulation is “奴有子个...郎有子个... I have a..., and my man has a...”, or “奴上子个...郎上子个...I get on... and my man gets on...”.

Here is a complete example, selected from the above:

姐有子个心来，郎有子个心，那你拿个那个心来着子。姐个心弗怕、一心硬来一心软，只怕硬个是肚肠，软个是个心。
This sister has a heart, and that man has a heart. But which heart does he bring? This sister's heart is not afraid, should one part be tough and the other tender. Her only fear is that the tough part is the guts, and the tender the heart.

Bu Bu Jiao 步步娇 (Every Footstep Coquettish)

- Southern *sanqu* (stand-alone songs).
- Frequency: 7 • Sentiments: varied; admiring, sadness, ...

	Form							First lines (and other significant lines)	
	7△	5△	5△	4	4△	5△	5△ ⁶⁹⁶	(= the standard form)	
1.	7△	5△	5	4	4△	5	7△	<答 Answer> 你今何必多惊讶，[他]自有真声价。 Why should you be so surprised today, [he] has his own real reputation. 雪月是知音，[只恐]雪消花落斜阳下。The snow-white moon is a bosom friend, [I'm only afraid] the snow will melt and the flowers will fall under the setting sun.	
2.	7△	5△	5△	4	4△	5△	3	5△	<No title> 人面桃花真堪羨，偏惹游蜂恋。Her face as delicate as peach blossom is truly enviable, attracting the wandering bees to fall in love.
3.	7△	5△	5△	4	4△	6△	5△	5△	<No title> 嫩容一似春初晓，步步迷芳草。Her tender face is like the dawn of spring, and her every step can enchant the grass.
4.	7△	5△	5△	4△	5	5	5△	5△	<No title> 行行珠泪青衫湿，[恨杀]风儿急吹来。 Strings of pearl-like tears wet the blue shirt, [I complain] the wind blows too fast.
5.	7△	5△	5	7	4△	5	5△	5△	<No title> 杭州有个人如玉，却在苏州住。 This jade-like beauty was born in Hangzhou, but lived in Suzhou. ...命薄随风去。Her poor fate gone with the wind.
6.	7△	5△	5△	4	4△	5△	4△	5△	<No title> 生来偏觅知心侣，常得知心许。 Born to look for an intimate partner, often receiving promises from others.
7.	7△	5△	5△	4	4△	5△	5△	5△	<No title> 向来不肯逢人意，那得人称许。Always unwilling to meet people's wishes, how can she gain the praise of others?

⁶⁹⁶ *Zhongguo quxue da cidian* 中国曲学大辞典 [Dictionary of Chinese qu study], 805.

Observed characteristics and summary:

- a) Essentially, this is a seven-line form, with the following character-numbers typical: 7, 5, 5, 4, 4, 5, 5;
- b) However, several songs insert an additional short line just before the final line;
- c) Every line except the fourth should rhyme.

Here is a complete example, selected from the above:

人面桃花真堪羨，偏惹游蜂恋。多情处处牵，珠泪横抛，令人肠断。座上态千般，更○他、音韵随风转。

Her face as delicate as peach blossom is truly enviable, attracting the wandering bees to fall in love.

Leaving her affections all around, with tears flowing like pearls, truly it's heart-breaking.

The people at the banquet give a thousand looks, ..., her charming voice lingering in the wind.

***Jiang'er Shui* 江儿水 (River Water)**

- Southern *sanqu*.
- Frequency: 7
- Sentiments: varied; melancholy, praising.

Form							First lines (and other significant lines)	
5▲	3△	7△	7△	7△	6△	4▲	(= the standard form)	
6△ ⁶⁹⁷								
1. 5	3△	7△	7△	7△	6△	4	6△	<答 Answer> 听说[罢]真堪笑, [我也]不笑伊。 [只是]尘凡怎得知仙侣? It's worth laughing after hearing that, [but I also] won't laugh at you. [Just] how can one find a celestial companion in this mundane world?
2. 5	3△	7△	7△	7△	6△	4	6△	< No Title> 月下踏梅影, [风前]弱柳枝。 Under the moon I tread in the plum shadows, the weak willow branches sway [in the wind].
3. 5△	3△	7△	7△	7△	6△	4	6△	< No Title> [你]莫恃知名早, [须知]花不牢。 [You] shouldn't feel secure about your overnight stardom, [noting that] flowers are never sturdy.
4. 5	3△	7△	7△	7△	6△	4	6△	<咏技艺 Ode to skills> 若论聪明性, 谁似伊。 In terms of intelligence, who is like her?
5. 5	3△	7△	7△	7△	6△	4	6△	< No Title> 愁病相兼日, 腰肢软。 Sorrow and illness go hand in hand all day long, her waist being soft.
6. 5	3△	7△	7△	7△	6△	4	6△	< No Title> 只道[是]杭州女, [原来是]旧院的。 All I know is that [she is] a woman from Hangzhou, [and it turns out that she is] from the Old Courtyard (Nanjing brothels).
7. 5	3△	7△	7△	7△	6△	4	6△	< No Title> [对此]应知态风流。恨转多, 多情却被多情误。 [In this regard] you should recognise that charming demeanour. But resentment grows, and those with too much emotion (<i>qing</i>) are easily hurt.

⁶⁹⁷ *Zhongguo quxue da cidian* 中国曲学大辞典 [Dictionary of Chinese qu study], 806.

Observed characteristics and summary:

- a) Eight lines, strictly adhering to the standard;
- b) Except for the first and penultimate lines, all lines should rhyme;
- c) The lyrics address a varied range of themes and sentiments, including lamenting the courtesans' life experiences, describing their amorous manners, melancholy, and lovesickness.

Here is a complete example, selected from the above:

[对此]应知态风流。恨转多，多情却被多情误。脸儿带笑当行货，口儿逞辩争先户。一转秋波觑我，高着腔儿，那许旁人属和。

[In this regard] you should recognise that charming demeanour.

But resentment grows, and those with too much emotion (*qing*) are easily hurt.

With a smile on her face, working as a courtesan, with an eloquent mouth, trying to argue her way to first place.

With her amorous eyes gazing at me, she raises her tone, not allowing others to join in.

Lan Hua Mei 懒画眉 (Too Lazy to Paint Brows)

- Southern *sanqu*.
- Frequency: 5
- Sentiments: praising.

	Form					First lines (and other significant lines)
	7△	7△	7△	5	7△ ⁶⁹⁸	
1.	7△	7△	7△	5	7△	风流心性本天生，一到青楼薄有名。With romantic and charming nature innate, she gained fame after passing the brothel's gate.
2.	7△	7△	7△	5△	7△	无端逐逐向姑苏，四首瓊花有也无。I rushed to Gusu for no reason, yet lingered. The four jade flowers exist but only as an illusion.
3.	7△	7△	7△	5	7△	娘行瞥见使人疑，何时妖妍似往时。 Puzzled after catching a glimpse of her; why was she so pretty and coquettish, and different from before?
4.	7△	7△	7△	5	7△	娘行自是辈中豪，宫样乔妆赛阿娇。 This lady truly stands out among her peers, with palace-style makeup, her beauty rivalling that of the imperial consort Zhao Feiyan. ⁶⁹⁹
5.	7△	7△	7△	5	7△	风流跌宕使人疑，莫道伊行尚待时。Experiencing her flirtatiousness makes people doubtful. Do not say it's too late for her to leave.

⁶⁹⁸ *Zhongguo quxue da cidian* 中国曲学大辞典 [Dictionary of Chinese qu study], 781.

⁶⁹⁹ A Jiao 阿娇 is a reference to Zhao Feiyan 赵飞燕, a famous beauty and imperial consort during the Western Han Dynasty. She was known for her delicate beauty and graceful dancing.

Observed characteristics and summary:

- a) Five lines, strictly adhering to the standard pattern;
- b) With the exception of the penultimate line, all lines should rhyme;
- c) Most of the lyrics evaluate the behaviour of courtesans and prostitutes, sometimes negatively.

A complete example, selected from the above:

风流心性本天生，一到青楼薄有名。明眸皓齿度彬彬。[假饶]脱却烟花阵，终是幽闺伴月人。

With romantic and charming nature innate, she gained fame after passing the brothel's gate.

With eyes bright and teeth white, and manners always so fine.

[If] escaping the brothel's line, finally she'll be the moon's companion in her boudoir.

***Suo Nan Zhi* 锁南枝 (Tying the Southern Branches)**

- Southern *sanqu*.
- Frequency: 4
- Sentiments: praising; lamenting; melancholy.

	Form									First lines (and other significant lines)
	3	3 _△	7 _△	5 _△	5 _△	3	3 _△	3	3 _△ ⁷⁰⁰	
1.	3	3 _△	7 _△	5 _△	5 _△	3	3 _△	3	3 _△	名家草，尽入林，空留小鸟枝上鸣。Great talents depart, entering the deep woods, leaving only the birds singing on the branches.
2.	3	3 _△	7 _△	5 _△	5 _△	3	3 _△	3	3 _△	腰肢瘦，怯舞衣，迎风一曲真罕稀。With such a slim waist, her shyness sets her dance attire fluttering. Truly a rare and precious performance in the breeze.
3.	3	3 _△	7 _△	5 _△	5 _△	3	3 _△	3	3 _△	卿多病，我药伊。东西献笑暂且稀。My dear, you are often unwell, and I am your medicine. Offering my smiles from east to west, yet such joy is rare and fleeting.
4.	3	3 _△	7 _△	5 _△	5 _△	3	3 _△	3	3 _△	年方妙，二十春，胸襟洒落句语清。She is young, in her twenties, with a great breadth of mind and clear words.

- a) Nine lines, all strictly adhering to the same standard pattern;
- b) These songs praise the courtesans' good qualities or lament their miserable fates.

⁷⁰⁰ *Zhongguo quxue da cidian* 中国曲学大辞典 [Dictionary of Chinese qu study], 800. The songs in *Wu Ji Bai Mei* all adhere to just one of the two known structures for *Suo Nan Zhi*.

Zui Dongfeng/ Chenzui Dongfeng 醉东风/ 沉醉东风 (Drunk in the East Wind)

- In Ming period sources, one encounters both southern and northern versions of this tune.⁷⁰¹ In *Wu Ji Bai Mei*, all four songs conform to the southern version.
- Frequency: 4
- Sentiments: nostalgic; melancholy; praising.

Form	First lines (and other significant lines)
7△ 7△ 6△ 4△ 7△ 4△ 4△ 4 4△	
1. 7△ 7△ 6△(re) 4△ 7△ 4△ 4△ 3 4△	想当初鸾笙凤簧，到如今幽○相傍，[也]只是花星天上，[也]只是花星天上。 Thinking back then, to the <i>luan</i> mouthorgan and phoenix pipe. ⁷⁰² Still now, if we're together..., it's [just] like a constellation of flowers in the sky, [just] like a constellation of flowers in the sky.
2. 7△ 7△ 7△(re) (The following contents are missing)	想当初同居凤帟，喜相依白头相缔。 Thinking back then, we lived together in a boudoir decorated with curtains embroidered with phoenixes, relying on each other happily, longing to grow old together.

⁷⁰¹ *Zhongguo quxue da cidian* 中国曲学大辞典 [Dictionary of Chinese qu study], 806.

⁷⁰² Referring to the playing of *sheng* and *xiao*.

3. 7△ 7△ 6△ (re) 4△ 7△ 4△ 4△ 3 4△

关心事你须自思，天上种如何落地？

You have to sort out your business by yourself, otherwise how can the celestial seeds fall to the ground?

4. 7△ 7 6△ (re) 4△ 7△ 4△ 4△ 4 4△

想当年名儿噪时，端只为歌喉娇媚。

Thinking back then, when she was renowned, it was solely for her delicate and melodious singing voice.

- a) Nine lines, adhering to the standard structure but with slight variation in the penultimate line and having the third line always reiterated;
- b) The lyrics often express nostalgic and melancholy sentiments, looking back to the past and considering what things used to be like.

A complete example, selected from the above:

想当年名儿噪时，端只为歌喉娇媚。喜得他有情痴，喜得他有情痴。逢人留意，真个是相如遍地。杨花果奇，[这]名须自思，再十年怕，东风送伊。

Thinking back then, when she was renowned, it was solely for her delicate and melodious singing voice.

Fortunate to have a loving fool dotting on her, fortunate to have a loving fool dotting on her.

Leaving her affections with everyone she met, truly her lovers were everywhere.

Poplar flowers are indeed peculiar, and [this] fame requires self-reflection.

For I am afraid that in another ten years, the east wind will send her off.

Yu Jiao Zhi 玉交枝 (Jade Branches Entwined)

- Southern *sanqu*.
- Frequency: 4
- Sentiments: melancholy; amorous; admiring.

	Form							First lines (and other significant lines)	
	4△	7△	7△	6△	7△	7△	7△	7△ ⁷⁰³	
1.	4△	7△	7△	6△	7△	7△	7△	7△	吾言休笑，惜花心宁独这遭。Don't laugh at my words; a heart that cherishes flowers would rather endure a solitary moment.
2.	4△	7△	7△	6△	7△	7△	7△	7△	月儿高者，携素手忙来看者。 The moon is high, (we) hold each other's hands and hurry to see.
3.	4△	7△	7△	6△	7△	7△	7△	7△	娇娥○爱，正春时花心自开。 Graceful maiden... love, the flower hearts bloom in spring.
4.	4△	7△	7	6△	7△	7△	7△	7	佳人堪爱，[似]海棠花刚刚盛开。 This beautiful lady is worth adoring, [like] the crab-apple flowers just beginning to bloom.

- a) Eight lines, strictly adhering to the standard pattern;
 b) These lyrics are predominantly evocative and romantic, depicting amorous scenarios.

⁷⁰³ *Zhongguo quxue da cidian* 中国曲学大辞典 [Dictionary of Chinese qu study], 807.

Shua Hai'er 耍孩儿 (Playing with Kids)

- Northern *sanqu*.
- Frequency: 3
- Sentiments: praising.

	Form									First lines (and other significant lines)	
	7△	6△	7▲	6△	7▲	7△	3△	4	4△ ⁷⁰⁴		
1.	7△	6△	7△	7	7	7△	3	3△	4	4△	[则]我将花容细细描, [只是]他香腮分外娇。 [Now] I will paint her flowerlike face in detail, [just because] her cheeks are extraordinarily delicate.
1.	6△	6△	7△	6△	7△	7△	3△	4	4△	4△	我心中爱你娇, [只恐]乍相逢别样高。 I love your charms in my heart, [I'm only afraid of] your proud heart when meeting for the first time.
2.	5	6△	7△	7	7(re)	7△	3	4	4△	4△	他酒量非○, 酒○来兴自高。 She is not a light drinker, and when drinking she is naturally in high spirits.

a) Essentially, this is a nine-line form, loosely adhering to the standard pattern;

b) The first and fourth lines occasionally vary in number of characters. In one case, the fifth line is reiterated and, in another, an additional three-word line is inserted after the sixth line. This playful approach to form is, perhaps, reflected in the tune's name, meaning "Playing with Kids".

c) These three songs vary widely in their themes and sentiments.

Observed characteristics and a summary:

⁷⁰⁴ *Zhongguo quxue da cidian* 中国曲学大辞典 [Dictionary of Chinese qu study], 751.

Chuan Bo Zhao 川拔棹 (Paddle Stirring the River)

- Southern *sanqu*.
- Frequency: 2
- Sentiments: melancholy and regretful; missing someone.

	Form						First lines (and other significant lines)	
	3/7△	6△	7△	(re)7△	7△	6△	6△ ⁷⁰⁵	
1.	6△	6	7	(re)7	7△	6△	6	想从良原未决，到如今越兴发。The desire to settle down was not firm at first, but now it's getting stronger and stronger.
2.	3△	6△	7	(re)7	7△	6△	6△	咱何意，念佳人心似迷。 What's on my mind? Missing that beauty, my heart seems enchanted.

- Seven lines, mainly adhering to the standard pattern;
- Neither song features a seven-character first line (common in other *Chuan Bo Zhao* examples elsewhere).

⁷⁰⁵ *Zhongguo quxue da cidian* 中国曲学大辞典 [Dictionary of Chinese qu study], 808.

Guizhi Xiang 桂枝香 (Fragrant Osmanthus Branch)

- Southern *sanqu*.
- Frequency: 2
- Sentiments: praising.

	Form	First lines (and other significant lines)
	4△ 4△ 7 7△ 4▲ (re)4▲ 4△ 4△ 3△ 5 5△ ⁷⁰⁶	
1.	4△ 4△ 7 7△ 4△ (re)4△ 4△ 4△ 3△ 5 5△	态见清瘦，灵犀常透。Her demeanour is graceful and slender, with a crystal-clear empathic mind. 度词儿白雪堪称，声袅袅绕梁非谬。The lyrics she rendered, pure as white snow, are truly admirable; her melodious voice lingers around the beams, it's no exaggeration to say
2.	4△ 4△ 7 7△ 4△ (re)4△ 4△ 4△ 3△ 5 5△	高情无赛，芳容堪爱。Her noble sentiments are unparalleled, her charming face is truly lovable.

Here, the eleven lines closely adhere to the standard pattern. Presented below is a complete example:

态见清瘦，灵犀常透。度词儿白雪堪称，声袅袅绕梁非谬。秦楼罕寿，秦楼罕寿，阳台寻偶，芳名已久。笑相留，若得轻云去，依然明月钩。

Her demeanour is graceful and slender, with a crystal-clear empathic mind.

The lyrics she rendered, pure as white snow, are truly admirable; her melodious voice lingers around the beams, it's no exaggeration to say.

Relationships in the Qin Tower rarely last long, Relationships in the Qin Tower rarely last long,

On the terrace, in search of a partner, her fragrant name has long been known.

With a smile, she asks you to stay; but if she leaves on a light cloud, she will remain like a bright moon hooked in the sky.

⁷⁰⁶ *Zhongguo quxue da cidian* 中国曲学大辞典 [Dictionary of Chinese qu study], 773.

Huang Ying Er 黄莺儿 (Yellow Warbler)

- Southern *sanqu*.
- Frequency: 2
- Sentiments: nostalgic; praising.

	Form	First lines (and other significant lines)
	5△ 6△ 7△ 4△ 4△ 7△ 3△ 4 5△ ⁷⁰⁷	
1.	5△ 6△ 7△ 4△ 4△ 7△ 3△ 4 5△	数载共交游，欢韶光似水流。For years, we've been friends and have played together, the joyous times flowing like water.
2.	5△ 6△ 7△ 4△ 4△ 7△ 3△ 4 5△	一种富家腔，带浓妆倚短墙，南来北往人争望。 She has the accent of a wealthy family, leaning against the low wall with heavy makeup, people from the South and North scrambling to look at her.

This is a nine-line form. Here, the songs conform closely to the standard patterning. The following example indicates the rhyming words:

数载共交游 (*you*), 欢韶光似水流 (*liu*), 只今花貌原如旧 (*jiu*)。逢人肯擲 (*chou*), 当场肯讴 (*ou*),
风流不落他人后 (*hou*)...

For years, we've been friends and have played together, the joyous times flowing like water, yet still your flower-like face remains the same. Always ready to lend a hand on strings, and burst into song, your elegance and charm are second to none.

⁷⁰⁷ *Zhongguo quxue da cidian* 中国曲学大辞典 [Dictionary of Chinese qu study], 795.

Hupo Mao'er Zhui 琥珀猫儿坠 (Amber Cat Pendant)

- Southern *sanqu*.
- Frequency: 2
- Sentiments: admiring.

		Form					First lines (and other significant lines)	
	4	5△	7△	7△	2△	4	4△ ⁷⁰⁸	
1.	4	5△	7△	7△	2△	4	4△	[看他]霜肌雪骨，转眼令花愁。[Look at her] frosty skin and snowy bones, even her glances make the flowers sorrowful.
2.	4	5△	7△	7△	2△	4	4△	果然窈窕，月闭与花羞。Sure enough she is gentle and graceful, obscuring the moon and making flowers blush.

- a) Seven lines, closely adhering to the standard pattern;
 b) Both songs lament the transience of beauty..

⁷⁰⁸ *Zhongguo quxue da cidian* 中国曲学大辞典 [Dictionary of Chinese qu study], 795.

***Jie Jie Gao* 节节高 (Steadily High):**

- Southern *sanqu*.
- Frequency: 2
- Sentiments: melancholy.

Form	First lines (and other significant lines)
5△ 3△ 7△ 3△ 3△ 3△ 7△ 7△ 7△ 7△ ⁷⁰⁹	
1. 5△ 3△ 7△ 3△ 3△ 3△ 7△ 7 7△	英雄溷草茅，世争嘲，惟卿○○○。The hero is trapped in chaotic weeds, and the world is scrambling to ridicule him, only you ... (The handwriting is blurred thereafter).
2. 5△ 3△ 7△ 3△ 3△ 3△ 7△ 7 7△	青楼没下稍，等萍飘。The days in the brothel seem to have no end, waiting for the duckweeds to float away. 海棠一夜被风吹，红英满地无人扫。The crab-apples were blown down by the wind overnight, and the red flowers are all over the ground with no-one sweeping them.

- Nine lines, closely following the same pattern;
- However, in other collections, lyrics for *Jie Jie Gao* usually include an additional seven-character line, but that is absent in both these songs.
- Both songs depict being challenged by unpredictable natural forces.

⁷⁰⁹ *Zhongguo quxue da cidian* 中国曲学大辞典 [Dictionary of Chinese qu study], 780.

***Jie San Cheng* 解三醒 (Alleviating Hangover Three Times)**

- Southern *sanqu*.
- Frequency: 2
- Sentiments: amorous; joking.

Form	First lines (and other significant lines)
7 _△ 7 _△ 7 _△ 6 _△ 7 _▲ 7 _△ 3 _△ 4 _▲ 4 _△ ⁷¹⁰	
1. 7 _△ 7 _△ 7 _△ 6 _△ 7 _△ 7 _△ 3 _△ 4 _△ 4 _△	爱煞他纤纤玉手，爱煞[他]相携汗漫游。Loving her slender hands, and loving the way [she] sweats while we hold each other.
2. 7 _△ 7 _△ 7 _△ 6 _△ 7 _△ 7 _△ 3 _△ 4 4 _△	见他时依然处女，到如今遍地相思。When I met her she was still a virgin, yet now her lovers are everywhere.

- a) Nine lines, closely adhering to the standard pattern;
- b) Both sets of lyrics are explicitly related to sexual activity.

⁷¹⁰ *Zhongguo quxue da cidian* 中国曲学大辞典 [Dictionary of Chinese qu study], 777.

***Shan Po Yang* 山坡羊 (Goats on the Hillside):**

- Southern *sanqu*.
- Frequency: 2
- Sentiments: lovesickness; melancholy.

	Form	First lines (and other significant lines)
	7 _△ 7 _△ 7 8 _△ 3 5 _△ 7 _△ 4 4 _△ 2 5 2 5 ⁷¹¹	
1.	7 _△ 7 _△ 7 8 _△ 3 5 _△ 4+5 _△ 4 4 _△ 2 5 2 5	冷凄凄秋霜飞坠，乱迷迷[好似]落花飞絮。Cold and desolate, the autumn frost flies and falls. Riotously dazzling, [like] falling flowers and flying catkins.
2.	7 _△ 7 _△ 7 8 _△ 3 5 _△ 4+5 _△ 4 4 _△ 2 5 2 5	月溶溶玉人何处，风冷冷涧箫归去。Melting moonlight, where is that jade person? Cold wind, the sound of a flute on the stream gradually fades away.

a) Thirteen lines, adhering to the same pattern;

b) In other collections, the seventh line has just seven characters but, in both of *Wu Ji Bai Mei*'s songs, the seventh line is broken into a 4+5 structure, where the last two characters of the first half of the line are immediately repeated in the second half:

侯门一入(4)，一入深无底(5)。

Once you enter a prominent family, **once you enter** it will be bottomless.

开窗一望(4)，一望天无际(5)。

Opening the window and **looking, looking** at the boundless sky.

⁷¹¹ *Zhongguo quxue da cidian* 中国曲学大辞典 [Dictionary of Chinese qu study], 792. This tune has two styles of sentence patterns in total. Here is one style.

Wutong Shu 梧桐树 (Phoenix Tree)

- Southern *sanqu*.
- Frequency: 2
- Sentiments: melancholy.

	Form	First lines (and other significant lines)
	5 5 _△ 4 5 _△ 7 _△ 7 _△ 4 5 _△ 7 _△ ⁷¹²	
1.	5 5 _△ 4 5 _△ 5 5 _△ 4 5 _△ 7 _△	风流偏惹愁，人旧愁不旧。A flirtatious person can provoke melancholy; people grow old, but melancholy does not.
2.	5 _△ 5 _△ 4 5 _△ 5 5 _△ 4 5 _△ 7 _△	人儿不解愁，岁老人依旧。This little person doesn't understand what sorrow is; she grows older but remains the same.

a) Nine lines, closely adhering to the same pattern;

b) In other collections, the fifth and sixth lines contain seven syllables. Here, however, both contain five.

⁷¹² *Zhongguo quxue da cidian* 中国曲学大辞典 [Dictionary of Chinese qu study], 793.

Yue Yun Gao 月云高 (Cloud over Lofty Moon)

- Southern *sanqu*.
- Frequency: 2
- Sentiments: amorous; lovesickness.

	Form										First lines (and other significant lines)	
	4 _△	5 _△	5	5 _△	4	5 _△	5	5 _△	7 _△	7 _△ ⁷¹³		
1.	4	5 _△	5	5 _△	4	5 _△	5	5 _△	3	7 _△	3 5 _△	春风初觉，闲亭乱芳草。At the first awakening of the spring breeze, the fragrant grass is chaotic in the leisure pavilion.
2.	4	5 _△	5	5 _△	4	5 _△	5	5 _△	3	7 _△	3 5 _△	蓦然一见，姻缘兮非浅。Seeing each other suddenly, knowing our predestined relationship is by no means fragile.

a) Ten lines, closely adhering to the same pattern;

b) In other collections, the final three lines often proceed as 5_△, 7_△, 7_△. However, in the two *Wu Ji Bai Mei* songs, additional three-character lines are inserted between them. The editor of *Wu Ji Bai Mei* explains in an annotation that the last lines have been borrowed from another tune, *Du Jiang Xue* 渡江雪 (Snow Crossing the River).

⁷¹³ *Zhongguo quxue da cidian* 中国曲学大辞典 [Dictionary of Chinese qu study], 775. This is the second of three variants.

Yuanlin Hao 园林好 (Splendid Garden)

- Southern *sanqu*.
- Frequency: 2
- Sentiments: praising; lamenting one's fate.

Form					First lines (and other significant lines)
7△	7△	6△	6△	6△ ⁷¹⁴	
1. 7	7△	6△	6△	6△	<答 Answer> 免嗟讶我有话儿。他岂是闲条野枝? Don't be surprised if I say something. She is not an idle wild branch, is she?
2. 7△	7	6△	6△	6	<咏原起 Ode to a family background> 出身时良家可依，没来由良人相背，[却]做了青楼生计。 When she was born, she had a good family to rely on, but through no fault of her own she encountered her husband's betrayal, [ending up] making a living in the brothel.

- a) Five lines, adhering to the same pattern (with minor variations in rhyme);
- b) Both songs consider courtesans' fates.

⁷¹⁴ *Zhongguo quxue da cidian* 中国曲学大辞典 [Dictionary of Chinese qu study], 806.

Zao Luo Pao 皂罗袍 (Black Silk Garment)

- Southern *sanqu*.
- Frequency: 2
- Sentiments: praising; melancholy.

	Form	First lines (and other significant lines)
	6△ 5 4△ 7△ 7△ 4 4△ 4 4△ 7△ ⁷¹⁵	
1.	6△ 5 4△ 7△ 7△ 4 4 4 3△ 8△	行到百花深处，见此花香艳。 Walking to the depths of the flowers, and seeing how charming and fragrant this flower is.
2.	6△ 5 4 7△ 7△ 4 4△ 4△ 4△ 7△	看他倒人怀抱，似风吹棣叶。 Seeing her fall into someone's arms, like leaves blown by the wind...

- a) Both songs contain ten lines, the first deviating a little further away from the standard, specifically in the last two lines.
- b) A complete example is presented here, indicating the rhyming characters:

⁷¹⁵ *Zhongguo quxue da cidian* 中国曲学大辞典 [Dictionary of Chinese qu study], 774.

看他倒人怀抱 6△ (*bao*), 似风吹棣叶 5, 漫向窗□ 4。潇潇有韵比芭蕉 7△ (*jiao*), 依依多态令人闹 7△ (*nao*)。

千钟不醉 4, 逢人肯嘲 4△ (*chao*)。醉来尤妙 4△ (*miao*), 逢人肯桃 4△ (*tao*)。联芳姐妹谁不道 7△ (*dao*)。

Seeing her fall into someone's arms, like leaves blown by the wind, spread against the window.

Her elegance rivals the banana plant's trace, and her tenderness stirs up one's passions.

A thousand cups won't make her drunk, with each encounter, she jests with grace.

Her drunkenness adds to her charms, and a peach-like sweetness appears when others are near.

Among the fragrant sisters, one and all, who doesn't speak of her the most?

Zhu Ma Tin 驻马听 (Stopping a Horse to Listen)

- Southern *sanqu*.
- Frequency: 2
- Sentiments: amorous; praising.

	Form	First lines (and other significant lines)
	4 _△ 7 _△ 4 4 4 _△ 7 _△ 7 _△ 4 _△ 4 4 _△ ⁷¹⁶	
1.	4 _△ 7 _△ 4 4 4 _△ 7 _△ 7 _△ 4 _△ 4 4 _△	家世秦楼，不比寻常仕女流。 Born in a famous brothel, she is unlike ordinary ladies.
2.	4 _△ 7 _△ 4 4 4 7 _△ 7 4 4 4 _△	生长侯门，恨杀桃腮画不成。 Born in a noble family, I resent that I can't paint her peachy cheeks..

This tune exists as both a northern and southern *qu*. In *Wu Ji Bai Mei*, both songs are southern *qu*, with the 10 lines closely adhering to the standard pattern. Presented below is a complete example, with the rhyming words also indicated:

生长侯门 4 (*men*), 恨杀桃腮画不成 7 (*cheng*)。 [应是]天工嫉妒 4, 人意多乖 4, 才貌难句 4。
休言丝管日纷纷 7 (*fen*), 这遏云绝调真堪敬 7。洒落多情 4, 频遮檀口 4, 半掩朱唇 4 (*chun*)。
Born in a noble family, I resent that I can't paint her peachy cheeks.

⁷¹⁶ *Zhongguo quxue da cidian* 中国曲学大辞典 [Dictionary of Chinese qu study], 787. In *Wu Ji Bai Mei*, the sentence pattern conforms to the second version recorded in the dictionary.

[It's as if] the heavens must be envious, for people's wishes are usually thwarted, and talent and beauty are rarely found together.
 No need to mention the daily hustle and bustle of silk and bamboo music,
 For her unrivalled tunes that obstruct the clouds from moving truly command respect.
 With her charming affectionate manners,
 She often covers her sandalwood mouth and half-hides her vermilion lips.

Da Sheng Yue 大勝乐 (Music of Grand Triumph)

- Southern *sanqu*.
- Frequency: 1
- Sentiments: melancholy.

	Form									First lines (and other significant lines)
	6 Δ	6 Δ	7 Δ	6 Δ	7 \blacktriangle	7 Δ	4	5	4 Δ ⁷¹⁷	
1.	7 Δ	6 Δ	7 Δ	6 Δ	7 Δ	7 Δ	5	4	4 Δ	青楼事一旦都休，问伊行心耐否。Once her time in the brothel is over, I ask if she can suppress her desire to leave. 瑶琴罢却求鸾奏，[可正是]，红叶谁人寄御沟。 The jade zither ceases, yet one yearns for the phoenix's melody; ⁷¹⁸ [indeed,] who will send the crimson leaves down the royal canal? ⁷¹⁹

This is a nine-line form. Here, the patterning deviates slightly from the standard arrangement encountered elsewhere.

⁷¹⁷ *Zhongguo quxue da cidian* 中国曲学大辞典 [Dictionary of Chinese qu study], 782.

⁷¹⁸ Referring to the playing of *sheng* and *xiao*.

⁷¹⁹ This is common imagery in ancient Chinese literature, usually used to express a sense of sadness due to separation or longing for distant lovers or relatives. "Crimson leaves" symbolize the arrival of autumn and are also a symbol of separation, "royal canal" refers to the ancient royal water channels, and it may also symbolize something or somebody far away.

Dian Jiang Chun 点绛唇 (Painting Crimson Lips)

- Northern *qu*
- Frequency: 1
- Sentiments: amorous; praising.

Form

First lines (and other significant lines)

4_△ 4_△ 3_△ 4_△ 5_△⁷²⁰

1. 4_△ 4_△ 3_△ 4_△ 5_△

风流名妓，脸儿娇媚。 An amorous courtesan, with a dainty face.

This is a five-line form, closely adhering to the standard pattern.

Dongou Ling 东瓯令 (A Command from Dongou)

- Southern *qu*
- Frequency: 1
- Sentiments: melancholy.

Form

First lines (and other significant lines)

3 3_△ 7_△ 7_△ 5_△ 7_△ 5_△⁷²¹

1. 3 3_△ 7_△ 7_△ 5_△ 7_△ 5_△

如凝恨，似带羞，端为伤春非病酒。(She) seems to be growing regretful, but also shy. It turns out she is lamenting the lost spring rather than being sick of drunkenness.

This is a seven-line form, here closely adhering to the standard pattern.

⁷²⁰ *Zhongguo quxue da cidian* 中国曲学大辞典 [Dictionary of Chinese qu study], 735.

⁷²¹ *Zhongguo quxue da cidian* 中国曲学大辞典 [Dictionary of Chinese qu study], 785.

Gu Mei Jiu 沽美酒 (Selling Fine Wine)

- Northern *qu*
- Frequency: 1
- Sentiments: amorous.

Form

First lines (and other significant lines)

5△ 5△ 7△ 4△ 6△⁷²²

1. 6△ 6△ 6 4 6△ 3△ 6 7 4△ 4△ 4 4△ 7△

<问者自答 The questioner answers himself/herself> 匪君言我怎知? 匪君言我怎知?

How would I know if you didn't tell? How would I know if you didn't tell?

This song deviates quite dramatically from the standard form for *Gu Mei Jiu*: the first three lines are longer or shorter, and then an additional eight lines are added.

Hong Na'ao 红衲袄 (Red Coat)

- Southern *sanqu*.
- Frequency: 1
- Sentiments: amorous.

⁷²² *Zhongguo quxue da cidian* 中国曲学大辞典 [Dictionary of Chinese qu study], 762.

Form	First lines (and other significant lines)
6△ 6△ 7△ 7△ 6△ 6△ 8 7△ ⁷²³	
1. 6△ 6△ 7△ 7△ 6△ 6△ 8 10△	[你本是]江上的娇生养, [你本是]闸口的俏女娘。 [You were once] a pampered girl on the river, [you were once] a pretty young woman at the pier. ⁷²⁴

This is an eight-line form. Here, the song conforms closely to the standard, apart from the final line, which is substantially longer.

Shou Jiangnan 收江南 (Resuming Jiangnan)

- Northern *sanqu*.
- Frequency: 1
- Sentiments: melancholy.

Form	First lines (and other significant lines)
7△ 7△ 7△ 4△ 7△ ⁷²⁵	
1. 8 7△ 7△ 7△ 3 7△	< Asking 问> [呀], 早知道这般样品致, [呵], 谁待要恋繁花? [Ah], if only I knew (she had) such aspirations earlier. [Oh], who wants to fall in love with flowers?

This song deviates quite markedly from the standard structure for *Shou Jiangnan* (as encountered in other sources), specifically by having two extra lines at the beginning and three syllables in the penultimate line.

⁷²³ *Zhongguo quxue da cidian* 中国曲学大辞典 [Dictionary of Chinese qu study], 783.

⁷²⁴ This verse refers to the well-documented boat prostitutes of the period.

⁷²⁵ *Zhongguo quxue da cidian* 中国曲学大辞典 [Dictionary of Chinese qu study], 763.

Xiang Liu Niang 香柳娘 (Woman of Aromatic Willow):

- Southern *sanqu*.
- Frequency: 1
- Sentiments: admiring.

Form											First lines (and other significant lines)		
5▲	(re)5▲	4△	7△	5▲	(re)5▲	5△	5△	5▲	(re)5▲	4△	4△ ⁷²⁶		
1.	5	(re)5	4△	7△	5△	(re)5△	5△	5△	5△	(re)5△	5△	4△	正青春二八，正青春二八，姿容婉媚，新声偏引喉间气。 At the young age of 16, at the young age of 16, she has a charming look, and her new voice draws breath from her throat.

This is a 12-line form, here, adhering quite closely to the standard pattern. The second, sixth, and tenth sentences are reiterative lines.

⁷²⁶ *Zhongguo quxue da cidian* 中国曲学大辞典 [Dictionary of Chinese qu study], 781.

Xin Shui Ling 新水令 (Fresh Water Command)

- Northern *sanqu*.
- Frequency: 1.
- Sentiments: admiring.

Form						First lines (and other significant lines)	
7 _Δ	7 _Δ	5	5 _Δ	4	5 _Δ ⁷²⁷		
1.	7 _Δ (re)7 _Δ	7 _Δ	5	5 _Δ	4	6 _Δ	<p>< Ask 问 > [问]君家何不唱繁花? [问]君家何不唱繁花,却唱那绿梅无价?</p> <p>[Asking] the gentleman, why don't you praise the flourishing blossoms? [Asking] the gentleman, why don't you praise the flourishing blossoms, but praise the priceless green plums instead?</p>

This example deviates slightly from the standard pattern by reiterating the first line and adding a syllable in the final line.

⁷²⁷ *Zhongguo quxue da cidian* 中国曲学大辞典 [Dictionary of Chinese qu study], 757.

Jiaojiao Ling 饶饶令 (Command of Jiaojiao)

- Southern *sanqu*.
- Frequency: 1
- Sentiments: mystery.

Form				First lines (and other significant lines)
5 _△	5 _△	7 _▲	5 _△ + 3 _△ ⁷²⁸	
1.	5 _△	5 _△	7 _△ 7 _△ (re) 7 _△	< Answer 答> [这话]分明说与伊, [须]记得月来时, 一种香风勾人意。 [These words] are clearly meant for you, [you must] remember that when the moon arrives, a kind of fragrant breeze captivates the mind. (The reiterative verse:) 泥人儿在云雾里。 Clay figurines in the clouds and mist.

a) This is essentially a four-line form, but with the fourth line repeated – a notable divergence from the standard encountered in other sources, where the fourth line is followed by a capping three-character formulation;

b) This song evokes a mysterious mood, with ambiguous references to mist, the moon, captivated minds, and clay figurines.⁷²⁹

⁷²⁸ *Zhongguo quxue da cidian* 中国曲学大辞典 [Dictionary of Chinese qu study], 800.

⁷²⁹ *Ni ren'er* 泥人儿 (clay figurine) Here, the poem may be referring to the myth of human beings being created out of clay by Nüwa (a goddess with the head of a human being and the body of a serpent, and creator of mankind in Chinese mythology). As ordinary human beings, we live in a world full of unknown variables (clouds and mist). Or perhaps the clay figurines symbolise simple, unpretentious reality, while the clouds and mist represent dreamy, illusory fantasy, hinting at wonderful but unattainable desires.

***Yan'er Luo* 雁儿落 (Wild Geese Descending)**

- Northern *sanqu*.
- Frequency: 1
- Sentiments: admiring.

	Form	First lines (and other significant lines)
	5 _Δ 5 _Δ 5 5 _Δ ⁷³⁰	
1.	3 6 3 6 _Δ 3 6 3 6 _Δ 3 5 6 _Δ 6 7 _Δ 7 3 4 6 _Δ 6 _Δ	<Asking 问> 你说他、静时节不爱喧，你说他、喧时节依然静。 You say, in quiet times she doesn't like noise; you say, in noisy times she stays quiet.

The structure and patterning of this song has absolutely nothing in common with other *Yan'er Luo* songs encountered elsewhere.

⁷³⁰ *Zhongguo quxue da cidian* 中国曲学大辞典 [Dictionary of Chinese qu study], 762.

***Yi Chun Ling* 宜春令 (Greeting Spring Command)**

- Southern *sanqu*.
- Frequency: 1.
- Sentiments: admiring.

	Form	First lines (and other significant lines)
	3 3 _△ 7 _△ 4 7 _△ 7 _▲ 7 _△ 2 _△ 4 _▲ 4 _△ ⁷³¹	
1.	3 3 _△ 7 4 7 _△ 7 _△ 7 _△ 2 _△ 4 4 _△	徐家寿，寿几龄。This woman is from the Xu family, how old is she?

This is a ten-line form. Here, the song adheres closely to the standard pattern.

***Yi Jiang Feng* 一江风 (Breeze Over the River):**

- Southern *sanqu*.
- Frequency: 1
- Sentiments: admiring.

⁷³¹ *Zhongguo quxue da cidian* 中国曲学大辞典 [Dictionary of Chinese qu study], 784.

Form

First lines (and other significant lines)

3▲ 5△ 5△ 3▲ 4 5△ 5△ (re)5△ 5△ 5△⁷³²

3 5△ 5△ 3 4 5△ 5 (re)5 5△ 7 5△

好娇羞，一种天然美，况且多聪慧。

So dainty and shy, she's a natural beauty, and also so clever.

The standard form is 10 lines but, here, an additional seven-character line is inserted before the final line. Otherwise, the arrangement is consistent with the standard. The complete text, admiring a beautiful and clever courtesan, is provided below, with rhyming words indicated:

好娇羞 3，一种天然美 5 (*mei*)，况且多聪慧 5 (*hui*)。唱词儿 3，教得三遭 4，便自般般会 5 (*hui*)。

迎新送旧的 5，迎新送旧的 (*re*) 5。空嗟事已非 5 (*fei*)，[眼见的一家数口 7]，只有伊为最 5 (*zui*)。

So dainty and shy, she's a natural beauty, and also so clever.

Singing the lyrics, after only three times of learning, she naturally grasps them.

Greeting the new and sending off the old, Greeting the new and sending off the old.

Lamenting in vain, things are no longer the same, [of those I know in this household], only she excels.

⁷³² *Zhongguo quxue da cidian* 中国曲学大辞典 [Dictionary of Chinese qu study], 780.

Yi Feng Shu 一封书 (A letter)

- Southern *sanqu*.
- Frequency: 1
- Sentiments: admiring.

Form	First lines (and other significant lines)
5 _△ 6 _△ 5 _△ 6 _△ 7 7 _△ 3 3 _△ 7 _△ ⁷³³	
1. 5 _△ 6 _△ 5 _△ 6 _△ 7 7 _△ 4 _△ 7 _△	王家妓洛仙，貌娉婷婷使我怜。Luoxian is a courtesan from the Wang family, her graceful beauty makes me adore her.

- The standard form is nine lines but, here, the seventh and eighth lines are replaced by a four-character line;
- This song praises the attributes of a courtesan with the surname Wang.

⁷³³ *Zhongguo quxue da cidian* 中国曲学大辞典 [Dictionary of Chinese qu study], 777.

Yu Baodu 玉抱肚 (Jade Waistband):

- Southern *sanqu*.
- Frequency: 1
- Sentiments: admiring.

Form

First lines (and other significant lines)

4△ 7△ 7▲ 7△ 7△ 7△⁷³⁴

1. 4△ 7△ 7 7△ 7△ 7△

桃坞名妓，论瑶琴当年罕稀。As a famous courtesan in peach blossom dock, her skills at playing the jade zither were rare in those days.

- a) The six-line form conforms closely to the standard;
- b) This song praises the skills of the courtesan Xu Ren 徐仁, especially noting her musical abilities.

⁷³⁴ *Zhongguo quxue da cidian* 中国曲学大辞典 [Dictionary of Chinese qu study], 807.

Zhe Gui Ling 折桂令 (Command to Pluck the Osmanthus)

- Northern *sanqu*.
- Frequency: 1
- Sentiments: pitying.

Form

7△ 4▲ 4△ 4 4 4△ 7△ 7△ 4△ 4 4△ (Standard style)⁷³⁵

1. 7△ 4 4△ 4 4 7△ 7△ 7△ 4△ 3 4△

First lines (and other significant lines)

< Asking 问> 你既道花落雪消，况这夕阳，又早斜了。You say that the flowers have fallen and the snow has disappeared, and the sun has already set.

- a) This is an eleven-line form, fairly closely conforming to the standard pattern, though the sixth line is substantially longer than usual.
- b) This song considers processes of natural change, as discussed with courtesans.

⁷³⁵ *Zhongguo quxue da cidian* 中国曲学大辞典 [Dictionary of Chinese qu study], 759.

Zhuo Mu Er 啄木儿 (Woodpecker):

- Southern *sanqu*.
- Frequency: 1
- Sentiments: praising.

Form	First lines (and other significant lines)
3 3△ 7△ 7 7△ 7△ 7△ 7△ ⁷³⁶	
1. 3 3△ 7 7△ 7△ 7△ 7△ 7△	骨儿媚，神亦清，气韵潇疏出语句。 Her charm is in her bones, her spirit refreshing; her elegant demeanour is expressed in her words.

This is an eight-line form, closely adhering to the standard pattern. The full text is as follows, with the rhyming words also indicated:

骨儿媚 3，神亦清 3 (*qing*)，气韵潇疏出语句 7。休说他幽艳心情 7 (*qing*)，只听他唱出新声 7 (*sheng*)。

轻敲檀板展朱唇 7 (*chun*)，忙梳云鬓前浑 7 (*hun*)。[眼见得]勾引三吴诸俊英 7 (*ying*)。

Her charm is in her bones, her spirit refreshing; her elegant demeanour is expressed in her words.

No need to mention her mysterious and beautiful states of mind, just listen to the new voice she sings.

Lightly tapping the sandalwood clappers, slightly opening her vermilion lips,

Busily combing her cloud-like hair before the mirror.

[Clearly,] she captivates the talented young men from the Three Wu regions.⁷³⁷

⁷³⁶ *Zhongguo quxue da cidian* 中国曲学大辞典 [Dictionary of Chinese qu study], 766.

⁷³⁷ The Three Wu regions (now Suzhou, Wuxi and Changzhou in Jiangsu Province) echo the title of the song collection, *Wu Ji Bai Mei*.

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