

INTRODUCTION

SONG FORMS AND PRINTING CONVENTIONS IN LATE IMPERIAL CHINA

This book is about the circulation of popular songs and their contribution to the dramatic transformation in literary aesthetics and culture in China between 1580 and 1643, the period known as the late Ming. The critic and playwright Zhuo Renyue 卓人月 (style name Keyue 珂月, active 1606–1636) singled out popular songs as the only original verse form of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644):

Our Ming [writers of] poetry (*shi* 詩) yield pride of place to [authors of the] Tang dynasty; in [writing] song-lyric (*ci* 詞) they defer to Song-dynasty [authors], and for operatic and non-operatic songs (*qu* 曲) defer to the Yuan. Probably the “Songs from Wu” [present-day Suzhou] (*Wu ge* 吳歌) and “Hanging Branch” (*Guazhi'er* 掛枝兒), “Luo River Lament” (*Luojiang yuan* 羅江怨), “Date-Beating Pole” (*Dazao gan* 打棗干), and “Silver-Spun Thread” (*Yinniu si* 銀紐絲) are the unique accomplishment (*yijue* 一絕) of our Ming [dynasty].¹

Zhuo Renyue uses the word *jue* 絕 (special skill, unique accomplishment) to single out popular song, but has already suggested above that popular songs are noteworthy because they do not follow past literary models—thus negating conventional notions of skill in composition. If one takes the word *jue* in another sense, as “cut off” or “not to be repeated again” (*juehou* 絕後), Ming popular songs should not have furnished models for imitation, either. Yet these song-texts were repeated, and imitated, and songbooks were consulted for a phrase or two by men of dubious poetic skill who needed to compose songs in order to join in drinking parties during their travels. Such

¹ Cited in Chen Hongxu (1597–1665), *Hanye lu*, juan 2. Zhuo Renyue was a native of Renhe, near Hangzhou, and became a tribute student (*gongsheng*). Zhu Yizun notes that Zhuo’s poetry was unconstrained by formal modes; see *Ming shi zong* (Taipei: Shijie shuju, 1962), 71: 7ab. Zhuo’s literary collection *Haunt of Budding Flowers* (*Ruiyuan ji* 蕊淵集) is no longer extant. He has one southern dramatic romance, *Xin Xixiang* 新西廂 (*New Romance of the Western Chamber*), and one extant *zaju* entitled *Huafang yuan* 花舫緣 (Meeting on a pleasure boat), attributed to Meng Chengshun in Shen Tai’s (fl. 1629) *Sheng Ming zaju*.

songs were also imitated and elaborated by members of the elite, who saw their own written and revised versions as just as authentic as the songs in the streets and those that circulated among courtesans that they emulated.

Zhuo Renyue neglected to say that the current tune names he so admired circulated primarily outside learned culture, among subelites that included illiterate women and children, townspeople, and courtesans—and members of the elite who imitated them. Popular song was a category for the learned to reinvent, no less in the Ming dynasty than in earlier periods when the literati had drawn on popular forms to enliven poetic culture. Ming prefaces and collections of popular songs did less than earlier anthologies of *cǐ* (song-lyric) and *sanqu* (non-operatic songs) had done to present them as songs by established authors or as “literature.”² Instead, they show a fertile interaction between commerce in publishing for an expanding literate population, on the one hand, and interest in emotion, or passion, and subjectivity (*qíng* 情) that bolstered the rejection of orthodoxy of literary form and thought by members of the elite, on the other.

By analyzing how collections of popular songs shaped and were shaped by the cultural contexts in which they were produced during the Ming dynasty, and by explicating the kinds of readings these song-texts invite, this book demonstrates that elite and non-elite editors, printers, and readers played roles in a momentous shift in modes of textual transmission in the late Ming—and in establishing a new process for “actualization” of texts, as Paul Ricoeur terms it, in the encounter between the world of the text and the world of the reader.³ Picking and choosing phrases from books, or “poaching,” defies the idea of a proper interpretation of a given text; moreover, it is an impertinence, according to the late historian of religion Michel de Certeau (1925–1986).⁴ And therein lies the crucial significance of

² Pauline Yu, “Song Lyrics and the Canon,” in idem, ed., *Voices of the Song Lyric in China* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 70–103.

³ See Ricoeur, *Temps et Récit*, 3 vols. (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1983–1985), vol. 3, pp. 228–63; available in English as *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), pp. 157–79; also Chartier, “Communities of Readers,” in idem, *The Order of Books*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), pp. 1–23 (esp. 4–5).

⁴ See Certeau, “Reading as Poaching,” in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 165–76 (esp. 170–76); also Roger Chartier, “Representations of the Written Word,” in idem, *Forms and Meanings: Texts, Performances, and Audiences from Codex to Computer* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), pp. 6–24.

innovations by Ming editors and printers who devised page formats, typography, and other topical and formalistic arrangements that facilitated such poaching, imitation, and other communal or self-directed readings and writings, performances or recollections of songs in the late Ming. Late-Ming editors' practices signaled a break from the monopoly of the elite over literary culture. Popular songs belong to a "tapestry" (*jin* 錦, meaning "the finest," "vast choice," and "essentials," as discussed in Chapter 1) of texts furnished by the publishing boom of the 1580s on. Further, these songs occupy a unique position in that tapestry due to their predominant concern with *qing* (subjectivity and passion); their language, form, and themes and the history of their publication are evidence that subjectivity came to be seen as something that could be manufactured from texts. Ming popular songs and related genres of drama, jokes, and anecdotes have been neglected or regarded as sources for social history until recently, as scholars have noted that the pattern of publication, selective reproduction, and piracy of texts, images, and calligraphic forms is intertwined with ways in which readers and authors learned to duplicate and manipulate texts in the late Ming and early Qing dynasties.⁵

The social and economic transformations of the late Ming determined the unique cast of the popular song tradition and its dissemination across social classes and geographic regions as the commercialization of agriculture, specialized manufacturing, and social differentiation and stratification on the village level counterbalanced (or in some instances bolstered opposition to) direct government control of the economy and contributed to cultural integration across classes. The rapid expansion of commercial publishing within this context was fueled by increasing status mobility and by the needs of a growing literate population—and, in turn, fed its desires.⁶ The

⁵ See, for example, Bai Qianshen, "Mingmo Qingchu shijue yishu zhong linmo yu fuzhi xianxiang yanjiu" (unpublished article). The impact of writing and reading on culture in China from the imperial to modern periods is explored in essays edited by Judith T. Zeitlin and Lydia H. Liu, *Writing and Materiality in China: Essays in Honor of Patrick Hanan* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003); see also Shang Wei, "The Making of the Everyday World: *Jin Ping Mei* and Encyclopedias for Daily Use," in David Der-wei Wang and Shang Wei, eds., *Dynastic Decline and Cultural Innovation: From the Late Ming to the Late Qing* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, forthcoming).

⁶ As Wilt Idema and others have noted, the rate of literacy remained low even in the Qing dynasty, when it was perhaps as high as 3 percent of the male population. Yet Ming books and the historical record yield evidence of a considerable

elite were those men having (or aiming at) full classical literacy, and bore responsibility for maintaining moral standards and for producing the “high” arts of poetry, calligraphy, and amateur painting, as well as formal writings on statecraft. The response of many members of the elite, or literati, to pervasive corruption among officialdom and violent purges of the official ranks was to reject those practices through which the elite reproduced social and cultural hierarchies that were perceived as ineffective, turning their attention instead to the “low” tradition, local matters, informal expressive genres, and matters of the heart.

At first, Ming popular songs were simply known by a list of tune names like the one given by Zhuo Renyue; roughly twenty tune names developed, substituted, or replaced one another in fashion from the mid-fifteenth century on.⁷ It is no coincidence that the literary term *shidiao* 時調, meaning “current tunes,” came into use around 1580, at the height of the Ming publishing boom, for although the tunes were orally transmitted, print played an important role in promoting this style of direct and unfettered description of feeling. The popular song tradition was “invented,” to borrow the historian Eric Hobsbawm’s term, by publishers and non-elite editors to revive earlier Chinese song traditions and to establish or symbolize the cohesion of the circles in the pleasure quarters.⁸ The pleasure quarters was a

range of *literacies*, discussed in Chapter 1. Evelyn S. Rawski suggests the Ming transformations as a blueprint for the Qing and modern periods; see her “Economic and Social Foundations of Late Imperial Culture,” in David Johnson, Andrew J. Nathan, and Evelyn S. Rawski, eds., *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 3–33; see Idema, Review of Evelyn Rawski’s book *Education and Popular Literacy in Ch’ing China*, in *T’oung Pao* vol. 66, nos. 4–5 (1980): 314–24. The rise of printing and of popular song in the Ming shared many features with the emergence of song-lyric (*ci*) in the Song dynasty, as discussed below. For a fine consideration of the two periods of transformation, see Paul Jakov Smith, “Problematizing the Song-Yuan-Ming Transition,” in Smith and Richard von Glahn, eds., *The Song-Yuan-Ming Transition in Chinese History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), pp. 1–34.

⁷ For a general introduction to the genre of Ming popular song, see Ye Dejun, “Mingdai suqu xu lun” (Preliminary study of Ming vernacular song), annot. Lowry (unpublished); Luo Jintang, “Mingdai xiaoqu” (Ming dynasty popular songs) and “Ming Qing liangdai xiaoqu zhi liubian” (The development of popular song in the Ming and Qing dynasties), in idem, *Jintang lunqu* (Taipei: Lianjing chubun shiye gongsi, 1977), pp. 572–93.

⁸ See Hobsbawm’s influential introduction “Inventing Traditions,” in idem and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 9, 10–14.

private space with great public impact, where intellectuals, talented courtesans, and *nouveaux riches* converged—and where virtually any one of these three groups could repeat song-texts as they chose, imitating one another, and reversing interpretations, as was the rule in this new verse tradition. The scholar and impresario of vernacular literature Feng Menglong 馮夢龍 (style name Youlong 猶龍, 1574–1646) compiled the best-known collections, entitled *Hanging Branch* (*Guazhi'er*; Appendix no. 19) and *Mountain Songs* (*Shan'ge* 山歌; Appendix no. 20). Even while Feng granted popular songs literary prestige, he participated fully in the business and profit of publishing them. The term “popular song” (*shidiao xiaoqu* 時調小曲 or *shishang xiaoling* 時尚小令, literally translated “current airs”) refers to anonymous songs that circulated orally, their reincarnations in cheap print and fine illustrated volumes, and collections edited by literati, not differentiating among authentic songs and imitations thereof—indeed, imitation is the principle that generated these songs. Commercial publishers enforced the rhetoric of new and current forms by advertising popular songs as the “newest” and “latest fashions” in performance materials, in woodblock-printed miscellanies (see Chapter 1). The notion of “currency” was not simply a concern for members of the elite mapping the development of song forms but an issue of selling books and of anticipating readers’ needs and desires for printed performance-texts.

This introduction has two aims. The first is to sketch the landscape of song forms and conventions for printing songs in order to establish the context for the chapters that follow. The second aim is to propose a new approach to the transmission of popular songs, elaborated below and in Chapter 1, that justifies the conceit of a “tapestry” of songs used in the title of this book. The first section below considers various relationships between performance and printed versions of performance, and traces how uses of performance-texts diverged from performance itself in the late Ming, as texts came to be tailored more and more to the needs of social exchange and tried to accommodate less proficient as well as skillful readers. The second section situates popular songs within the complex landscape of pre-Ming and Ming song forms that remained active and vital, to varying degrees, as performing and literary traditions into the Qing dynasty. The social context for popular songs in the pleasure quarters, discussed in the third section below, also represents a continuation of earlier periods and values, though the late Ming witnessed the full commercialization of the pleasure quarters. Miscellanies and

songbooks capitalized on the desires, first, for a glimpse of the courtesans, who were required to be charming and talented singers, and second, for a copy of their songs.

The gist of the perspective on the transmission of popular songs that is adopted in this study is as follows: Chinese song traditions were important as a medium of social exchange (and were, together with letter writing, far more personal and accessible as expressive genres than either fiction or the theatrical forms that enjoyed their golden age in the Ming dynasty). The value of popular song texts lay not in their content but in their intrinsic form and its capacity to be imitated, repeated, varied, or used in games of *bricolage* with courtesans (as love letters could be tacked together from songs—or songs from the sentimental clichés of letters) or among peers at drinking parties to establish social cohesion. The arrangement and annotation of song-texts by Ming editors, printers, and commentators, examined in Chapters 1 to 5, bespeak a new and peculiar awareness of the reproducibility not only of the popular songs as performance-texts and as a means to convey feeling but of ideas and desires themselves, which were fashioned from texts.

A main argument of this study is that the development of popular songs as a genre was closely related to the reappraisal of literary values and to changing practices of literary and cultural transmission in late imperial China. Specifically, the rise of popular songs, beginning in the Jiajing reign period and peaking during the Wanli reign, has to be studied in the context of contemporary debates about imitation and the proper use of literary models, and also in the context of the new and more complex views of what represented vital literary language that emerged from these debates among members of the elite. Yet, while elite critics did much to shape the corpus of Ming popular song, widespread performance and publication of the song by commercial printers preceded the elite's involvement by at least two or three decades, as detailed in Chapter 1. I show that the avid attention to how vulgar songs spread and generated meaning was an essential quality of Ming popular songs as a genre. The spread of popular songs was not primarily a matter of elite appropriation and imitation; rather, the mode of imitation is central to the performance and subject matter of popular songs belonging to the common tradition based primarily in the pleasure quarters, detailed in Chapters 4 and 5, offered an alternative model through which the elite could unburden themselves of the rules of the classical tra-

dition. I would argue, following social historians of early modern Europe, that the understanding that desire could be bought and sold was a prerequisite for demand for luxuries such as viewing and reading songs—and, indeed, for the commercial expansion in the late Ming.⁹ Elite such as the iconoclast Li Zhi 李贽 (style name Zhuowu 卓吾, 1527–1602), who preached self-gratification (interests classed as *si* 私, meaning “selfish” or “self-centered,” “private” as opposed to “public” or “civic-minded”) and also, not coincidentally, championed the publication of vernacular fiction and drama, were not the cause for the growing interest in love and self-gratification (and for the demand for literature on those subjects) but a symptom of a shift in the economy of desire.

For the majority of literati, however, the dissemination of popular songs was cause for concern and for wonder. Elite like the wealthy amateur historian Shen Defu 沈德符 (style name Jingqian 景倩, 1578–1642) marveled at the way oral transmission of the current tune “Hanging Branch” fueled demand for printed books so that “the whole world could pass them on to sing over and over” (*jushi chuanyong* 舉世傳詠). He innocently called attention to how print culture catered to the interests of a growing literate population, but condemned the outcome of this industry in the falling standard of musical knowledge among the public. The semi-literate (*li er* 里耳) were unable to appreciate “the most refined forms of common music, let alone truly refined music.”¹⁰ Ming critics dispensed equal measures of praise and censure of the frank sexual content, bawdy language, and supposed freedom from rules of prosody of popular songs, but clearly recognized that their quality of utterance and irregular verse forms, the rapid change in fashions for these tunes, and the role print played in their spread were new and of their time.

The first part of this study (Chapters 1–3) provides a broad historical context for reading Ming popular songs and the quality of “genuineness” in their language that was of central concern to critics

⁹ See Arjun Appadurai, “Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value,” in idem, ed. *The Social Life of Things* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 3–63 (esp. 36–37). Chandra Mukerji and Michael Schudson offer a valuable summary of developments in the study of popular culture, noting the role of materialism, as well as other values and beliefs, in setting the context for economic behavior; see their “Introduction,” in Mukerji and Schudson, eds., *Rethinking Popular Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 1–61.

¹⁰ Shen Defu, *Wanli yehuo bian* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), p. 647.

of the time. Chapter 1 explores the link between printed performance-texts and readers—namely, how books shaped readers and were shaped by a variety of *literacies* that emerged during the Ming dynasty, ranging from recognition of a few words to ability to read and write vernacular Chinese to full classical literacy (achieved by perhaps 3 percent of the male population). Chapter 2 consists of a detailed discussion of the sources for Ming popular song, their formats, arrangement, and history. Chapter 3 examines prefaces and memoirs that reflect the blurring between the categories of “refined” and “common” expression, as well as the impact of the rise of print and the increasing social prestige of merchants and a new moneyed class on the collapse of a clear aesthetic hierarchy.

The second part (Chapters 4–5) examines the two popular song collections edited by Feng Menglong, offering them as case studies of how late-Ming publishing made noncanonical materials accessible and interesting to the elite and sub-elite. Chapter 4 is a publishing history of Feng’s first popular song collection, *Hanging Branch* (*Guazhi’er*), in which, paradoxically, he dissected the structure and vocabulary of popular songs to illustrate the value of “genuineness” and to critique orthodox learning, values, institutions, and regional culture. Chapter 5 elucidates the role played by commercial publications about the courtesans of Jiangnan in forging a new brand of localism for early seventeenth-century readerships, by tracing the publishing history of the Wu-dialect *Mountain Songs* (*Shan’ge*), the sister volume to the *Hanging Branch*.

Chapter 6 focuses on the practices of emulation and appropriation that are fundamental to the performance and reception of popular songs and dramatic arias, and explores how the notion of imitative reading that Feng illustrated in his song collections *The Hanging Branch* and *Mountain Songs* is reproduced in fiction. The practice of appropriating and savoring phrases from song-texts to express heartfelt desire established the norm for reading and assimilating other forms of vernacular literature as well. This mode of imitation—what I refer to as self-centered interpretation—is the lasting contribution of Ming popular songs to Chinese literature of the Qing and modern periods.

Zhuo Renyue, like other elite of his time, was steeped in the notion that one should ascertain the rules (*fa* 法) of each genre by emulating past masters to restore the vitality found in their works, and his belief that popular songs marched to a different tune was somewhat ironic—a wish to escape artifice, as Katherine Carlitz has

argued.¹¹ The debate on the use of literary models, which were never applied as slavishly or simplistically as opponents of the Archaist group (*Fugu pai* 復古派) that advocated study of ancient models at times implied, was linked to interest in what was current (*shi* 時) in prose and poetic writing.¹² A sizeable group of Ming-dynasty authors and statesmen articulated views about the basis for the prevailing spirit in poetry of each period and the inevitability of literary change. Indeed, all of the elite, those men who had full classical literacy, had to grapple with the logic of formalism based on study of ancient works that no longer spoke to the present.¹³

The Proximity of Performance and Print

Print made a difference in the scale of reception of popular song in the Ming dynasty, but its effects fell somewhat short of a revolution. Performance and print had coexisted in close proximity for centuries in China, with texts often available near the sites of performance.¹⁴

¹¹ Advocating the study of ancient literary models arose after the Hongzhi reign, in part as a reaction against the ornamentation of “chancellery style” (臺格體 *taige ti*) poetry. The period style or specific author one chose to emulate took on significance less on purely aesthetic grounds than as a practical matter of establishing a reputation among the swelling ranks of those studying for the civil service examinations and forging personal ties, political alliances, or links to a region; see Andrew Plaks, *Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 26–30; Guo Shaoyu, *Zhongguo wenxue piping shi* (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1961), pp. 305ff., 320–25. Chih-p'ing Chou, *Yuan Hong-tao and the K'ung-An School* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 3–19.

¹² See, for example, Yuan Hongdao's use of the term *shi* in his preface to the collected poetry of Jiang Yingke 江盈科 (1553–1605), entitled “Xuetao ge ji xu” 雪濤歌集序 (Preface to Snow Bank's collected verse), in *Yuan Zhonglang quanji* (Taipei: Weiwen tushu chubanshe, 1980), 1: 4b–7a. Yuan Zongdao forcefully links the issue of literary models or rules (*fa*) with what is current. He speaks of casting revolutionary new (*jin* 今) forms from the ancient (*gu* 古); see “Lun wen” 論文 (On literature), reprinted in Cai Jingkan, ed., *Mingdai wenlun xuan* (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1993), pp. 302–5.

¹³ Li Dongyang (pseudonym Xiya, 1447–1516) articulated the influential idea that each age had a distinct formal mode not easily reproduced, notably in his *Huai lu tang shihua* (SKCS vol. 1482), pp. 3–4b; see Guo Shaoyu, *Zhongguo wenxue piping shi*, pp. 331–40.

¹⁴ A full discussion of written derivatives of oral texts in China is beyond the scope of the present study. Anne McLaren provides an overview in “The Oral-Formulaic Tradition,” in Victor Mair, ed., *The Columbia History of Chinese Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), pp. 989–1014. I am indebted to studies of print and performance, notably Roger Chartier, *Publishing Drama in Early*

Anne McLaren has examined the very early examples of “performance culture in print,” as she terms the chantefable, or prosimetric texts alternating speech and verse, that were printed in late-fifteenth-century China to meet the demands of an expanding literate population who read in new ways. She challenges the assumption that vernacular publications stood in close, almost transparent relationship to the oral performance forms they represented. McLaren notes that even the earliest examples of sermons, sagas, and songs among the prosimetric texts preserved in the grottoes of Dunhuang in northwest China are simulations that are removed by at least one degree of separation from “authentic” written derivations of oral forms.¹⁵ Her claim is most pertinent to vernacular narrative (also in prosimetric form) that simulated or imitated the stance of an oral storyteller, meant not so much to capture the telling as to re-create it. Vernacular texts had generic expectations; whether intended as notations of performance or compositions for performance, texts were refinements of oral forms that applied conventions to render oral material useful or imitable for readers.¹⁶ Victor Mair found, in the case of Buddhist transformation texts (*bianwen*), that some people who were illiterate kept copies for good luck; thus various kinds of written derivatives were suited to different levels of literacy.¹⁷ These investigations into prosimetric narrative yield insight into the reasons for reproducing performance-texts, as distinct from the aesthetic or social considerations of performance itself. Late-Ming song-texts circulated in an environment in which attitudes toward texts had been transformed, as evidenced by ways of arranging texts on the page to facilitate expedient use, so that one could borrow a text to produce a

Modern Europe (London: The British Library, 1999); Kate van Orden, ed., *Music and the Cultures of Print* (New York: Garland, 2000); Ruth Finnegan, *Literacy and Orality: Studies in the Technology of Communication* (New York: Blackwell, 1988); Tokumaru and Yamaguti, eds., *The Oral and the Literate in Music* (Tokyo: Academia Music, 1986).

¹⁵ McLaren’s invaluable study discusses the status of chantefables as imitations of performance, and notes a range of funerary and imitative uses; see her *Chinese Popular Culture and Ming Chantefables* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), pp. 1–3, 11–13, 34–40, 36n15.

¹⁶ See Patrick Hanan, *The Chinese Vernacular Story* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), pp. 5–9, 11; McLaren, *Chinese Popular Culture*, pp. 37–39.

¹⁷ Victor Mair, *Painting and Performance* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1987), pp. 11–12; idem, *Tang Transformation Texts* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 108. Bell Yung has collected *nanyin* song-texts in Hong Kong since the 1980s, and finds that both the performances of and texts sold by blind singers are similarly believed to bring luck.

simulacrum, rather than view it as a representation (in other words, the distinction between true and false ceased to be meaningful in itself; rather, it generated new appreciation for illusion).

The relation between performance-texts and actual performance was never a transparent one. Stuart Sargent has explored the development of song-lyric in the context of printing and material culture in the Song dynasty, and points to the apparent contradiction between the ties of that song tradition to oral culture and the practices of circulating songs in manuscript and print. He cautiously proposes that print culture and the prevalence of printed song lyrics may have helped to encourage new avenues of aesthetic expression and perhaps fostered a tendency to distance oneself from the voicing of passion.¹⁸ Earlier examples both of song-lyric copied on the verso sides of account ledgers and of explications of sutras and phrases from song-lyric jotted in the margins of other documents preserved in the Dunhuang caves have been generally disregarded as copy practice, and hence as not vitally related to the song tradition. However, such marginalia offer important testament to a link between memorization of song words and writing.¹⁹

The manufacture of such hand-copied verses or fragments of song on paper can also tell us how songs were recalled—which was consistently without descriptive notation of the tune, and only indicating the tune name. Two hand-copied booklets of song lyrics from the first half of the ninth century, discovered in the Dunhuang grottoes by the expedition of Paul Pelliot (P 3836, P 3994), attest to the practice of circulating song lyrics in proper books. Marsha Wagner has speculated about the use of the finer of these, a butterfly-folded booklet of five anonymous songs (P 3994; see Figure 1), “as a memento of a visit, perhaps to a Jiangnan entertainment center. Or perhaps it was an art object for trade.” The neat calligraphic hand in the style of Ouyang Xun shows it was not the work of a schoolboy. She underscores the stylistic range in that one short book, from abstract

¹⁸ Sargent, “Contexts of the Song Lyric in Sung Times: Communication Technology, Social Change, Morality,” in Pauline Yu, ed., *Voices of the Song Lyric in China*, pp. 226–56, esp. 250–55.

¹⁹ Thirteen fragments of song or verse in the Sir Aurel Stein Collection date to 400–1000 C.E. The most complete examples are on the verso of monastic accounts; see Or. 8210/S. 4332 and Or. 8210/S. 8658. Original manuscripts in the British Library.

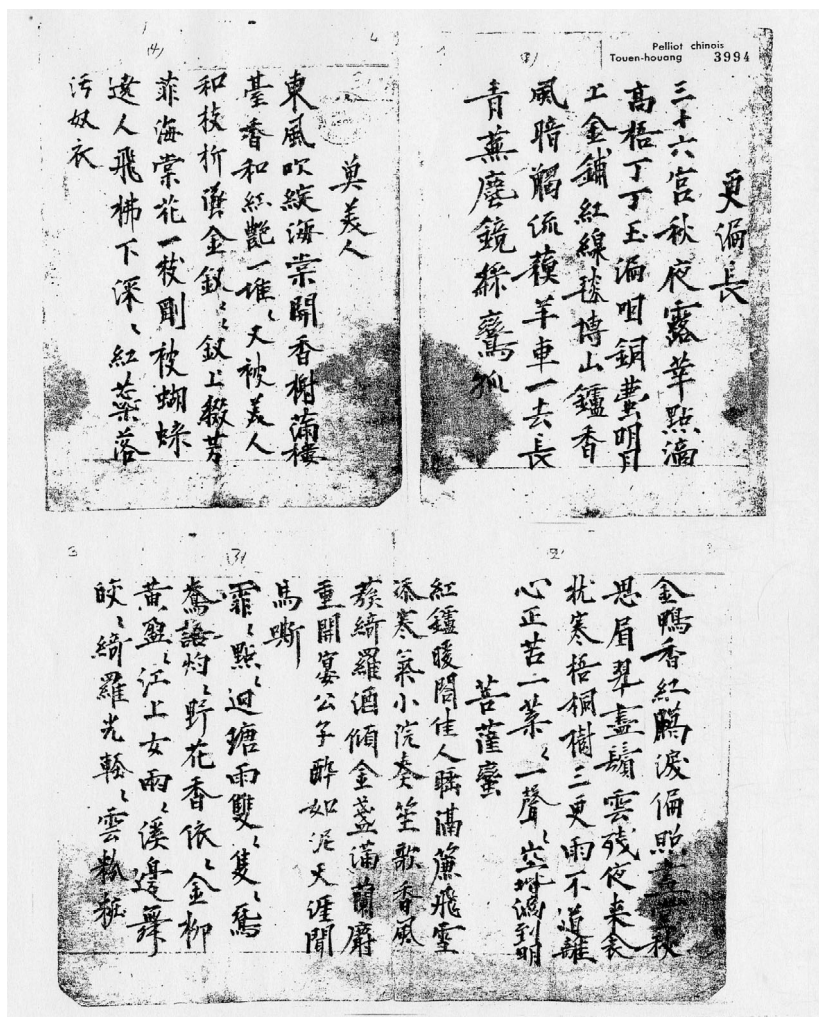


Figure 1 A butterfly-folded booklet of five anonymous songs, copied in the elegant script style of Ouyang Xun, offers the words to be remembered, and presumes knowledge of the music, simply noting the tune name. Dunhuang, ninth century (P 3994). 15 × 15 cm. Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

and evocative love songs to less polished verses, with gradations between the two extremes.²⁰ There is no attempt to legitimize the songs by giving an author.²¹

Song-lyric or verse written on walls, or copied there, could, in contrast, reach a wide audience to commemorate a visit. Temporary as such inscriptions were, the act of writing on a wall was fuel for a story surrounding the verse that would assuredly be passed down and associated with the individual writer. Moreover, “verses written on walls” (*tibi shi* 題壁詩) continued to be a commemorative form associated most strongly with feminine resistance through the Qing dynasty and the Republican era, since women favored songs as a medium through which to express their grief.²² Banquet songs, poetry, and song-lyric copied out eagerly in scriptoria, inked on walls, or inscribed in stone to facilitate the manufacture of rubbings all retained some sense of value as a trace of the performance, the author, or the site from which they had been retrieved. Yet an interesting assumption is apparent in the studies of the circulation of song-lyric: once copied out, song-texts were essentially severed from the performance context, though they accrued special value as traces of performance. However, songbooks and anthologies of songs that circulated from 1550 on retained a close connection to performance and, indeed, invited readers to treat both anthologies of song and individual song-texts as tapestries or dense-woven brocade (*jīn* 錦), gatherings of fine verses and the choicest phrases for the choosing, to be copied verbatim, or to be fragmented and appropriated for amorous or other socially expedient ends.

²⁰ Marsha Wagner, *The Lotus Boat: The Origins of Chinese Tz'u Poetry in T'ang Popular Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), pp. 42–47. Jao Tsung-Yi details the contents of P 3994, P 3836, and P 3137; see *Airs de Toen-Huang: Textes à Chanter des VIII^e–X^e Siècles* (Paris: Centre Nationale de la Recherche Scientifique, 1971), p. 62.

²¹ Four of the five songs are attributed to the literati Ouyang Jiong (896–971) and Wen Tingyun (812–872) in the early Tang anthologies of song-lyric *Among the Flowers* (*Huajian ji* 花間集) and *Facing the Winecup* (*Zunqian ji* 花間集).

²² Sargent, “Contexts of the Song Lyric,” pp. 229–32; Judith T. Zeitlin, “Disappearing Verses: Writing on Walls and Anxieties of Loss,” in idem and Lydia H. Liu, eds., *Writing and Materiality in China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), pp. 73–132.

*The Complex Landscape of Pre-Ming and Ming Song
Forms and Printing Conventions*

Ming popular songs (*shidiao* 時調) hold a singular place in the Chinese literary tradition of verse in lines of unequal length set to music because they were never canonized. Critics trace the musicalization of poetry back to fifth-century regulated verse, and note that Tang-dynasty quatrains (*jueju* 絕句) that laid the foundation for the song-lyric shared the same attention to tonal features and syllable length as regulated verse.²³ Tang-dynasty banquet music and popular traditions of composing “song words” (*chuzi ci* 曲子詞) opened up a variety of metrical patterns to which song words could be set that then saw fuller development in song-lyric (*ci*) during the Song dynasty. Song-lyric was subsequently eclipsed by operatic songs for drama (*qu*) and non-operatic songs (*sanqu*) during the Yuan, when new national and regional tune-types circulated. The rehearsals of the rise and decline of the various song forms by various critics tend to be programmatic, marking a loss of vitality and immediacy as the genres of ballad (*yuefu* 樂府), quatrain, song-lyric, and then non-operatic songs were each in turn textualized, compositional rules formalized, and the primary relation of music to text inverted, giving way to a form for poeticizing.²⁴ Ming popular songs preserved both the primary relation to music and the practice of verse interplay in a humorous vein (popular songs were often categorized together with jokes) that had been central to the traditions of *ci* and *sanqu* before they came to be viewed as canonical forms. *Shidiao* flourished and circulated in books in a variety of formats and levels of publication, yet remained outside the canon.

The scholar-official Wang Shizhen 王世真 (style name Yuanmei, 1526–1570) referred to change in song forms as *bian* 變, in the sense of “decline” or “degeneration,” when it became difficult to set verse to the existing musical repertoire. He used the same term, *bian*, to

²³ Shuen-fu Lin, “The Formation of a Distinct Generic Identity for *Tz’u*,” in Pauline Yu, ed., *Voices of the Song Lyric in China*, pp. 3–29; Yu-kung Kao, “The Aesthetics of Regulated Verse,” in Shuen-fu Lin and Stephen Owen, eds., *The Vitality of the Lyric Voice* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986), pp. 352–53.

²⁴ See, for example, Wang Shizhen, *Quzao*, in *Zhongguo gudian xiqu lunzhu jicheng* (hereafter *Xiqu lunzhu*) (Beijing: Xiju chubanshe, 1959), vol. 4, p. 27. Wayne Schlepp, *San-ch’ü: Its Technique and Imagery* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1970), pp. 4–8.

introduce operatic songs (*qu*) as a “development” from song-lyric after the Jin and Yuan political regimes had introduced new regional music when northern songs were found more pleasing to the ear; southern songs appeared when these northern songs did not accord with the tastes of those in the south.²⁵ However, the landscape of song forms was far more complex than Wang’s *Language of Song* (*Qu zao* 曲藻) would suggest, for northern and southern forms of non-operatic songs (*sanqu*) coexisted after the mid-fifteenth century, rather than supplanting one another. The *sanqu* tradition had developed during the Ming into a demanding literary form and varied musical repertoire, with two branches of northern and southern tunes that were neither strictly regional nor a function of matching singing styles to the instrumentation using strings (for northern tunes) or flute (for the southern styles); rather, they represented distinct stylistic choices and emphases on stanzaic form as opposed to phrasing. Certain Ming authors were regarded as masters in writing northern songs (*beiqu* 北曲), including one of the revered Seven Early Masters of classical prose Kang Hai 康海 (1475–1541) who was a Shanxi native, the Sichuan native Yang Shen 楊慎 (1488–1559), and Shandong native Li Kaixian 李開先 (1501–1568), while others were regarded as skilled in writing southern songs (*nanqu* 南曲), including Nanjing natives Tang Yin 唐寅 (1470–1523) and Chen Duo 陳鐸, Hanghai native Zhu Yunming 祝允明 (1460–1526), Shen Shi 沈仕 of Hangzhou, and Suzhou native Liang Chenyu 梁辰魚 (ca. 1519–ca. 1591).²⁶

The transmission of the tunes for *sanqu* was predominantly oral, despite the number of formularies that detailed the strictures of prosody for this song form, including the influential *Manual for Accurate Pitch and Abiding Harmony* (*Taihe zhengyin pu*) by the Ming Prince Zhu Quan (?–d. 1448), sixteenth son of the founding Ming emperor Zhu Yuanzhang. There was a surprisingly large number of—and new breadth of material in—*sanqu* collections published in the Zhengde

²⁵ Wang Shizhen, *Quzao*; see the modern reprint in *Xiqu lunzhu*, vol. 4, p. 27. Li Changji faults Wang’s critical focus on the setting of words to new tunes for being too narrow; see Li Changji, *Zhongguo gudai sanqu shi* (Shanghai: Huadong shifan daxue chubanshe, 1991), pp. 367–71.

²⁶ Wang Jide, No. 39, “Zalun,” in *Qu li*, p. 162. Shen Defu notes the northern style was a stylistic choice, not strictly regional. The northern style nearly disappeared during the Wanli reign, but was cultivated in Nanjing (which he refers to by its historical name Jinling); see Shen “Beici chuanshou,” *Wanli yehuo bian*, juan 25, pp. 646–47.

(1506–1522) and Jiajing reigns (1522–1567) of the Ming dynasty, including individual songs to both northern and southern tunes, song suites, suites of songs from dramas, and, intermingled with them, some popular songs to the same tune names; prefaces to these works granted literary prestige to the form of “modern music” (*jīn zhī yuè* 今之樂) or “modern ballads” (*jīn yuèfǔ* 今樂府).²⁷

Collections of Ming popular songs preserved in broad outline the conventions for printing the earlier song forms of *ci* and *sanqu*, which had circulated in woodblock format. The common practice was to specify the tune name and then give the song title or topic beneath that, in smaller print preceding the song-text. These conventions for printing songs in xylographic formats largely imitated the hand-copied manuscripts of early *ci* of the Tang and Song dynasties, whose texts had been formulated for existing tune-types. This technique for reproducing song-texts by both anonymous and known authors presumed that readers had knowledge of the tunes through oral transmission. Rulan Chao Pian has suggested that some time after the Song dynasty the tune titles attached to *ci* compositions became labels for their verse forms, and thus did not necessarily identify a tune as one might expect.²⁸ Song formularies for operatic and non-operatic songs to northern tunes (*beiqu*, the melodies of *zaju* variety plays) were established in the early Ming, and over the next two centuries the *sanqu* came to be treated as an elegant form of poeticizing that still retained its ties to musical performance, much as song-lyric did.²⁹

²⁷ Zhang Lu, Preface to *Cilin zhaiyan*, dated 1525; see the modern reprint in Cai Yi, ed., *Zhongguo gudian xiqu xuba huibian*, vol. 4 (Jinan: Qilu shu she, 1989), p. 2690. The *Cilin zhaiyan* is based on an anonymous anthology of *sanqu* entitled *Shengshi xinsheng*, with 1517 preface. Guo Xun refers to *sanqu* as ballads (*yuèfǔ*) in the 1566 preface to his *Yongxi yuèfǔ*, and enumerates the “fine lyrics and wondrous arias, suites and individual songs.” Katherine Carlitz analyzes prefaces to *sanqu* collections dating from the early to mid-sixteenth century in “Escape from Artifice: Ming Men of Letters and Their Interest in Popular Song” (unpublished article).

²⁸ Rulan Chao Pian, *Song Dynasty Musical Sources and Their Interpretation* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967), pp. 22, 37. It was common to have variants of a given tune in the *ci* repertoire, and there might be two or more names for the same tune; see Shi Yidui, *Ci yu yinyue guanxi yanjiu* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1989). Some notated melodies survive from the Song dynasty, notably for compositions by Jiang Kui, but the notation is prescriptive (as opposed to descriptive notation, which is the norm in Western music) and does not specify rhythm. Laurence Picken and Shuen-fu Lin have written on these materials.

²⁹ The short formulary by (Yuan) Yunnan Zhiyan (pseud.), entitled *Chang lun* (Treatise on singing), was included as a convenience for singers in the *sanqu* anthology *Yangchun baixue* (Sunny spring, white snow), comp. Yang Chaoying; see the modern reprint of *Chang lun*, in *Xiqu lunzhu*, vol. 1, pp. 155–63.

Literati were keenly aware of the generic expectations and distinct rhetorical capacities of “contemporary songs” (*shiqu*; referring primarily to non-operatic songs to northern and southern tunes, and only secondarily to popular songs). The language of song-texts for northern songs was a matter for connoisseurs, and manuscripts of songs and plays in the northern style flowed both into and out of the imperial court, whose predilection for that style of drama is well known (and who collected thousands of plays).³⁰ Attention to the strictures of prosody for southern songs (*nanqu*), using the same tune titles and many new tunes, increased in the late Ming, when critics textualized the knowledge that had been transmitted from teacher to student in memoirs and in manuals such as Wang Jide’s *Prosody for Song* (*Qu lü*; the terms *qu* and *ci* refer to contemporary drama as well).³¹

Most significant was not the attempt to standardize song forms through publication but, rather, the extreme care with which authors compared the different qualities of diction in the various song traditions, weighing the suitability of song forms for specific occasions. Moreover, Ming authors mirrored the nuances of language and the social proprieties of performance in fictional works, such as the novel *Plum in the Golden Vase* (*Jin Ping Mei cihua*, although that novel deliberately transgresses the rules of performance and setting, more often than not).³² Stephen West has characterized the imposition of requirements of written texts and narrative coherence by late-Ming editors on Yuan and early Ming performance-texts as a struggle for literary prestige and ideological control.³³ In the following chapters I take

³⁰ Sun Kaidi demonstrates that commercial publications of *qu* from the Wanli era and the *Yongxi yuefu* and contemporary books of *sanqu* originated from scripts in the imperial court; see Sun, *Yeshiyuan Gujin Zaju kao*, pp. 2, 149–53; see also Stephen West, “Text and Ideology: Ming Editors and Northern Drama,” in Smith and von Glahn, eds., *The Song-Yuan-Ming Transition*, pp. 330, 343–44.

³¹ Wang Jide, like Feng Menglong, was a disciple of the dramatist and theorist Shen Jing. Wang points out the gap between the literature on song (*qu*) and viable performance practice. For example, he takes issue with archaisms in the *New Formulary for the Nine Modes* (*Jiugong xinpu*) and suggests that the common intonation (level, *ping*, or oblique, *ze*) is preferable in most cases; see Wang Jide, *Qu lü*, in Xiqu lunzhu, vol. 4, pp. 160–62.

³² See Patrick Hanan, “Sources of the *Chin Ping Mei*,” *Asia Major*, n.s. 10, no. 2 (1963): 23–67; David Roy, “The Uses of Songs as a Means of Self-Expression and Self-Characterization in the *Chin Ping Mei*,” *CLEAR* vol. 20 (1988): 101–26; Katherine Carlitz, *The Rhetoric of Chin ping mei* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), pp. 71–77; Andrew Plaks, *The Four Masterworks of the Chinese Novel*, pp. 40, 70–71.

³³ West, “Text and Ideology,” in Paul Jakov Smith and Richard von Glahn, eds., *The Song-Yuan-Ming Transition*, pp. 329–73.

a somewhat different approach to the editing and rewriting of performance-texts in late-Ming editions of popular songs, in which editors likewise introduced a narrative aesthetic, but did so to bring the world of the reader into close proximity with the world of the text—inviting readers to borrow from these printed songs as a means to enter into drinking games and to configure their relationships to others.

The earliest extant books entirely devoted to Ming popular songs, from 1472, were for the tune name “Stilling the Clouds’ Flight” (*Zhu yun fei*), a favorite of the northern *sanqu* repertoire that had been adapted to the dramatic language and subject matter of popular song. These popular songbooks followed the conventions for printing *sanqu*, with the tune name written in a cartouche preceding each song-text, also used later in the anonymous *New Voices for an Age of Prosperity* (*Shengshi xinsheng*) published in 1517, and in the 1528 expanded version of that collection by Zhang Lu 張祿, *Beauty Plucked from the Forest of Song* (*Cilin zhaiyan*), as well as in the exquisite 1515 *Ballads for a Lasting Peace* (*Yongxi yuefu*), sponsored by the Marquis of Wuding and later Duke Yiguo, Guo Xun 郭勛 (1475–1542), who was a favorite of the Jiajing emperor (r. 1522–1565). However, the standardization of design and introduction of punctuation in the three books of lyrics for “Stilling the Clouds’ Flight” suggest that these slim (and thus presumably relatively affordable) woodblock-printed songbooks stimulated new ways of connecting texts to performance; they provide easily recognized markers for selecting texts from a jumble of examples and punctuation for those who did not already know the song form. The illustrations and bold graphic formats for sub-headings included in many books of song, in addition to the reverse white-on-black cartouches for tune names and song titles, also indicate that these books reached new kinds of readers who sought visual aids either to complement performance-texts (by offering appealing graphics or visual hooks) or to substitute for them (by allowing readers to appreciate the songs on paper).

It is difficult to produce quantitative information about readerships, since key kinds of evidence that might shed light on the readers and reception for print materials (subscription lists, printers’ price lists, reading clubs) are rare or nonexistent in the Chinese historical record before the nineteenth century.³⁴ Recent studies of the history

³⁴ Studies of the history of reading in Europe are vital to this type of research,

of the book in China have confirmed significant statistical patterns, charting the sharp rise in number and type of commercial imprints in the sixteenth century and the involvement of lineage members of printing families in distribution to span regional divides and create a national-level audience.³⁵ Dorothy Ko has observed how Yu Xiangdou, the head of the Santai publishing firm in northern Fujian, prominently displayed his own portrait on several imprints to create a new, close tie between editor and reader, and others have argued that the non-elite editor commanded a new authority in the late Ming.

Ming popular songs were called “contemporary songs” (*shiqu* 時曲) by some and “current popular individual songs” (*shishang xiaoling* 時尚小令) by others, to indicate similarity to the song traditions of *sanqu*.³⁶ The nomenclature is confusing because it is not applied consistently, and late-Ming writings often refer to the “northern songs” (*beici* 北詞) and “southern songs” (*nanci* 南詞) of *sanqu*, labeling them “song-lyric” (*ci*) because these forms followed strictures for prosody and were textualized to an extent perhaps greater than song-lyric had ever been.³⁷ Shen Defu (style name Jingqian 景倩, 1578–1642) coined the term *shishang xiaoling* in his memoir *Private Gleanings from the Wanli Reign* (*Wanli yehuo bian* 萬曆野獲編), based on his insider’s knowledge of life among the elite in the areas near the former capital Beijing (Beiji 北畿). Written during his residence in Jiangnan in

as long as one takes note of the character of the Chinese imprint and limitations of the historical record. See Robert Darnton, “First Steps Toward a History of Reading,” in idem, *The Kiss of Lamourette* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1990), pp. 154–87. See the richly informative studies included in Cynthia Brokaw and Kai-Wing Chow, eds., *Printing and Book Culture in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004). I thank Professor Brokaw for including me in the Oregon conference on the history of the book in China.

³⁵ Ōki Yasushi, “Minmatsu Kōnan ni okeru shuppan bunka no kenkyū” (Publishing culture in late-Ming Jiangnan) (hereafter “Shuppan bunka”), *Hiroshima daigaku bungakubu kiyō* vol. 50, special issue 1 (1991): 1–176; Lucille Chia, *Printing for Profit: The Commercial Publishers of Jianyang, Fujian (11th–17th Centuries)* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), pp. 234, 237–38; Cynthia Brokaw, “Commercial Publishing in Late Imperial China: The Zou and Ma Family Businesses of Sibao, Fujian,” *Late Imperial China* vol. 17, no. 1 (June 1996): 49–92; Ellen Widmer, “The Huanduzai of Hangzhou and Suzhou: A Study in Seventeenth Century Publishing,” *HJAS* vol. 56, no. 1 (June 1996): 77–122.

³⁶ The Hanlin Academician He Liangjun referred to popular songs and drama as *shiqu*; see *Siyōu zhāi congshuo*, juan 37 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), p. 338.

³⁷ Wang Jide uses the term “song-lyric” (*ci*) interchangeably with *qu* to refer to northern and southern songs as *beici* and *nanci*; see *Qu lǚ*, in *Xiqu lunzhu*, vol. 4, pp. 155, 173.

middle age, Shen's memoir has a strong subjective component, recalling what he witnessed as a youth, when his father and grandfather were ranking officials in Beijing; nevertheless, it is regarded as reliable historical evidence.³⁸

Shen Defu regarded current popular songs as an offshoot of the art of non-operatic songs (*sanqu*), which could be performed as individual songs (*xiaoling*) or song suites (*taoshu*). To his knowledge, popular songs had arisen in north China and were quite similar to *sanqu* using northern tune-types (the melodic material of *zaju* variety plays), but had gradually become distinct from operatic and non-operatic songs as new tune names emerged in the Huai River basin and in the Jiangnan region centering on Suzhou, Hangzhou, and Nanjing.³⁹ The current popular songs "describe nothing but bawdy or fawning behavior and love longing, yet all there is [to the tunes] is a slight rising and falling [in pitch]." In this way, Shen differentiated their language, and melodic contour, from the regularity of verse form in *sanqu*. Many of the tune names Shen Defu listed in the entry in his memoir were also used for individual non-operatic songs (*sanqu*).

While Ming popular songs are commonly regarded as an outgrowth of *sanqu*, the relation between the two forms is complex. Current popular songs represented a fresh alternative to *sanqu*, which was increasingly treated as an elegant form for poeticizing and, in fact, was regarded as the most extreme example of hackneyed sentiment and tired cliché. Shen Defu explained that the best lyricists of his day wrote individual songs or suites mixing northern and southern melodies, rather than full-scale *zaju* ("variety plays," in four acts with a "wedge," *xiezi* 楔子—that flourished in the thirteenth century).⁴⁰

This interplay between dramatic and non-dramatic songs (both individual songs, *xiaoling* 小令, and suites, called *santao* 散套 or *taoshu* 套數) found in *sanqu* is possible because the individual melodies are the same, while the ways in which they are arranged into suites are

³⁸ For a biography of Shen Defu, see the entry by Tsung-han Yang in L. Carrington Goodrich and Chao-ying Fang, eds., *The Dictionary of Ming Biography, 1368–1644* (hereafter *DMB*) (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), pp. 1190–91. The *Wanli yehuo bian* was divided in two sections. Shen's 1606 preface is reprinted in the early Qing edition of the memoir in its entirety; see Xie Guozhen, *Zengding wan Ming shiji kao* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1981), pp. 101–3.

³⁹ Shen Defu, "Shishang xiaoling," *Wanli yehuo bian*, juan 25, p. 647.

⁴⁰ See the entry "Tianci mingshou" (Famous lyricists), in Shen, *Wanli yehuo bian*, juan 25, pp. 642–43. Luo Jintang, *Zhongguo sanqu shi* (Taipei: Zhonghua wenhua chubanshe, 1957); idem, *Jintang lunqu* (Taipei: Lianjing shuju, 1977), pp. 572–78, 579.

different.⁴¹ Many examples of *sanqu* were written by known authors, in contrast to popular songs, almost all of which were anonymous works. Notable exceptions to this rule are the emperor Xuanzong (Zhu Danji, r. 1426–1435) and later authors Liu Xiaozu (1522–1589) and the statesman Zhao Nanxing (1550–1627), in his *Ballads Fragrant as my Garden* (*Fangruiyuan yuefu* 芳如園樂府), who wrote song-texts for popular tune names that are also found in the *sanqu* repertoire.⁴² Their efforts to write in a popular idiom highlight the peculiar value that imitations of “low” verse forms in elegant language held for the emperor himself, as well as for a broadening marketplace of readers with varying levels of textual mastery (see Chapter 2).

Gu Qiyuan 顧起元 (1565–1628), who served as Commissioner of Education in the southern capital Nanjing from 1610 to 1613, concurred with Shen Defu on most of the details of the chronology of tune names, though his *Superfluous Remarks made in the Parlor* (*Kezuo zhuiyu* 客座贅語) created another nomenclature, *shidiao xiaoqu* 時調小曲, or “unstaged songs to current tunes,” to contrast popular songs with the *chuanqi* southern dramatic romances that held increasing appeal for late-Ming audiences.⁴³ Although fictional characters in the novel *Plum in a Golden Vase* (*Jin Ping Mei cihua* 金瓶梅詞話) referred to the arias of *chuanqi* drama and popular songs in the same breath, dubbing them “current songs” (*shiqu* 時曲), and although the two were often juxtaposed on the printed page, they were in fact distinct.

The critic and dramatist Wang Jide 王驥德 (d. 1623) spelled out the distinction between *xiaoqu*, or “minor songs” which were unstaged, and *daqu* 大曲, full-scale operatic drama using gestures and a relatively

⁴¹ The best discussion of the formal flexibility of *sanqu* is by James Crump, *Songs from Xanadu* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1983), pp. 15ff. In contrast to *sanqu*, the music of popular song and *chuanqi* drama is distinct, though *xiaoqu* are often incorporated in Ming *chuanqi* drama for comic effect. Yet the dramatic repertoire is the only source from which to reconstruct the music of Ming popular song, as Mme. Chonghe Chang Frankel did for a performance of “Lamb on a Precipice” at the Metropolitan Museum in New York in 1979 for the opening of the Fisherman’s Garden.

⁴² The modern scholar Wu Mei questioned attribution of songs in bawdy, “unrestrained” colloquial language found in the *Fangruiyuan yuefu* to Zhao Nanxing; see his 1935 colophon to Zhao’s *Qingdu sanke erzong*, ed. Lu Qian (Shanghai: Zhonghua, 1936).

⁴³ Gu Qiyuan, *Kezuo zhuiyu*, annot. Chen Jiahe and Tan Dihua, juan 9 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), p. 302. Gu’s memoir *Superfluous Remarks* was first published in 1618. For a biography of Gu Qiyuan, see the entry by Lienche Tu Fang in *DMB*, pp. 734–46. For an overview of the *Kezuo zhuiyu*, see Xie Guozhen, *Ming Qing biji tancong*, pp. 28–30.

large number of players: the unstaged songs were *xiao*, meaning “minor” or “smaller,” using a single singer and less ornate language. The quality of the language of popular songs caught Wang’s eye, and he described these songs as close to the origins of drama, which lie in plain or unadorned language (he uses the phrase *bense* 本色, literally, “original color”).⁴⁴ In contrast to the language of *chuanqi* drama, in which even the preludes and transitional sections are subtly interwoven with the imagery and linguistic motifs of the whole play, often extending over forty or fifty scenes, in *xiaoqu* “each phrase is simple and direct. It is,” Wang Jide wrote, “*daqu* that is the orthodox form.”⁴⁵ Dramas employed a skilled performer or troupe of performers who could sing, monologue, joke, gesture, and do acrobatics, whereas popular songs could be performed by amateurs as well as by courtesans.⁴⁶ They were heard in city streets or the pleasure quarters, and wafted from boats that traversed the Grand Canal (the north-south axis of the empire) and other waterways that were the major transportation routes.

The Social Contexts of Popular Song

All the major Chinese song traditions were said to have originated in the circles of courtesans who were talented singers (and often skilled poets as well) and the literati who associated with them.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ The term *bense*, translated here as “plain” or “unadorned” language, is plain in reference to diction, syntax, and avoidance of obscurity. It is contrasted with ornate diction. Yuan Hongdao uses *bense* in the sense of raw speech, whose flawed and artless quality sets it off favorably from crafted diction; see “Xu Xiaoxiu shi,” *Yuan Zhonglang quanji*, 1: 2a–4b. In other contexts, *bense* refers to fidelity to the properties of a given genre, such as the authentic character of drama; see Patrick Hanan, *The Chinese Vernacular Story*, pp. 146–47, 234n37. *Bense* is a key principle in the drama criticism of Shen Jing and his followers; see Shen Jing, “*Bense* in Ming Drama Criticism,” *CHINOPERL Papers*, no. 24 (2003): 1–38.

⁴⁵ Wang Jide, *Qu liu*, entry 14 “Lun jiashu” (On lineage), and also entry 32 “Guomen” (Instrumental passages), in *Xiqu lunzhu*, vol. 4, pp. 121–22, 138–39.

⁴⁶ Hu Yinglin uses the term *daqu* to designate performances of *chuanqi* drama; see Hu, *Shaoshi shanfang qu kao*, in *Xin quyuan* (New Garden of Song), ed. Ren Na, Book 2.

⁴⁷ Liu Dajie discusses the birth of operatic and non-operatic songs of the Yuan in such terms; see his *Zhongguo wenxue fazhan shi*, vol. 3 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962–1963), pp. 4–5; Kang-I Sun Chang, *The Evolution of Chinese Tz’u Poetry* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 1–3, 9–10; Marsha Wagner, *The Lotus Boat*, pp. 81–91, 101–2.

Relations with courtesans were a rite of passage for examination candidates in the Ming and Qing dynasties, as in centuries past. Candidates engaged in drinking games and singing, exchanged love tokens with courtesans, and matched skills in poetry and painting with fellow literati (who often became lifelong friends) while keeping company with celebrated courtesans in the quarter.⁴⁸ Despite the dramatic social, economic, and intellectual changes driven by rapid growth of the commercial economy, monetization, a significant increase in literacy, growth of learning among the sub-elite, and the breakdown of rural status relationships—or perhaps precisely because of these changes—the forms of interaction between courtesans and those men who had full classical literacy during the Ming remained remarkably consistent with the model established during the Tang. Lively and extensive exchanges of songs between female singers and men of letters, in which both parties extemporized verse, are recorded in anecdotes of the Tang and Song (and in the songs themselves), though song-lyrics were not preserved in literary collections.⁴⁹

The lack of sanction for writing about love did not disappear in the Yuan and Ming, but *sanqu* and popular songs delving into the sentiments were legitimated by intellectual trends and thus were recorded and elaborated in song anthologies. In the early seventeenth century, a fully developed market emerged for materials from or describing the pleasure quarters, focusing on the urban centers of Suzhou, Nanjing, and Hangzhou. Paradoxically, the flourishing of prostitution in the Ming fueled the tendency to romanticize liaisons between the top courtesans and literati. The learned official and memoirist Xie Zhaozhe (jinshi 1592) complained that during the

⁴⁸ *The Record of the Northern Ward (Beili zhi)*, attributed to Sun Qi, documents the lives of top courtesans and institutions of the pleasure quarters in the T'ang dynasty capital Chang'an in the years 869–881; see Wagner, *The Lotus Boat*, pp. 83–85. The Qing literatus Fang Yizhi (1611–1671) recalled the camaraderie among examination candidates, and played on the word *ye* 冶, meaning “to melt” as well as “to seduce,” describing the southern capital Nanjing as a place where men indulge in sexual passion (*ye*) and form bonds (*ye*); see Fang, “Zhou Yuanliang ‘Yousheng’ Xu,” *Fushan wenji qian bian* 浮山文集前編 (probably 1671), 5: 12b; see the facsimile reprint in XSKCS vol. 1398 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1995–1999). Willard Peterson translates this passage and discusses the social scene of the Qinhui pleasure quarters where men of letters made their reputations in the 1630s; see Peterson, *Bitter Gourd* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1979), pp. 25–27, 141–45.

⁴⁹ See Ronald Egan, “The Problem of the Repute of *Tz'u* During the Northern Song,” in Pauline Yu, ed., *Voices of the Song Lyric in China*, pp. 201–5.

Wanli reign period taxes were imposed on the pleasure quarters in the two capitals (Nanjing and Beijing), known as “money for rouge and face powder” (*zhifen qian* 脂粉錢), while government-operated whorehouses hired out women directly in smaller municipalities. The practice of having female performers attend on officials at drinking parties, which had been the norm during the Tang and Song dynasties and the early Ming, gave way to the custom of ranking officials having courtesans in their homes and disregarding the ban on such entertainers.⁵⁰ Although in Xie Zhaozhe’s eyes the shift to privatize musical performances involving courtesans—and the privatization of and tolerance for common prostitution—represented “a disgrace to law and discipline as well as an embarrassment to the gentry class,” these and other Ming fiscal policies fostered commercial spaces where the public could either buy or bring in singers skilled in popular songs and operatic and non-operatic arias. Growing commercialization in turn shaped an easy acquaintance with literature that featured popular songs and dramas about love and sex.⁵¹

Popular songs held an important position in the literature on courtesans and romance (discussed in Chapter 5), as the most eloquent

⁵⁰ The status of official entertainer (*guanji* 官伎) was abolished during the Xuande reign (1426–1435). Xie Zhaozhe notes the ubiquity of prostitutes and the link between commercialization of sex and privatization; see his *Wu zazu*, juan 8 (Shenyang: Liaoning jiaoyu chubanshe, 2001), p. 163. See also, for example, Zhang Dai, “Twenty-Four Bridges” (*Ershisi qiao*), in *Tao’an mengyi*, juan 4 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1984), p. 35.

⁵¹ Xie Zhaozhe pinned the blame for the government practice of sharing in the profits from prostitution on the Legalist thinker Guanzi (Guan Zhong 管仲, d. 645 B.C.E.), who contributed the theorem of exchange ratios to Chinese economic thought—namely, that money has no intrinsic value but that the ruler can and should maintain a monopoly over its issue; see Xie, *Wu zazu*, p. 163. On Guanzi’s place in classical economic thought and criticism of the practice of hoarding specie by the state and wealthy individuals that diverged from the classic model, see Richard von Glahn, *Fountain of Fortune: Money and Monetary Policy in China, 1000–1700* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 28–33, 46. The *Guanzi* was required for study by certain examinees, despite the fact that the text was remarkably corrupt; see W. Allyn Rickett, *Guanzi: Political, Economic, and Philosophical Essays from Early China* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp. 32–33. Judith Zeitlin notes that teahouses and restaurants (*jiulou*) emerged as commercial venues for singers in the fifteenth century, replacing commercial urban theaters that had flourished between the twelfth and fourteenth century; see Zeitlin, “‘Notes of Flesh’: The Value of the Courtesan’s Song in Seventeenth-Century China,” in Martha Feldman and Bonnie Gordon, eds., *The Courtesan’s Arts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming); see also Lu E-ting, *Kunju yanchu shigao* (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1980), pp. 159–68; and Liao Ben, *Zhongguo gudai juchang shi* (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 1997), p. 77.

examples of naturalness. They achieved “naturalness” by inverting the aesthetic of earlier songs. First, the song-texts for Ming popular tune-names used language resembling spoken grammar, alternating between first-person voice and the third person, and the mountain songs used Wu dialect (or pseudo-dialect); second, popular songs described passion and the body in surprisingly frank and graphic language. The reordering of the hierarchy of elegant and common language is more apparent in popular songs than in other genres because writing about emotion was tolerated, and even required, both in this genre and in the circles of courtesans and literati who exchanged these songs; the interest in “natural” or “common” language was also shaped by print culture (see Chapter 3).

*The Position of the Scholar-Editor Feng Menglong
in the Publishing Boom*

The literatus Feng Menglong compiled the two best-known collections of popular songs, *Hanging Branch* (*Guazhi'er* 掛枝兒; Appendix no. 19) and *Mountain Songs* (*Shan'ge* 山歌; Appendix no. 20). Each is a monumental work of nearly four hundred song-texts, and each takes its title from a single tune name. Feng met with repeated failure in the civil service examination, despite the early recognition of his literary talent as one of “The Three Fengs” of his locality in Changzhou (with his elder brother Menggui and younger brother Mengxiong). He finally chose to become a tribute student (*gongsheng*) at fifty-six years of age, as an alternative route to qualify for official service; in the intervening years, he established himself as impresario of vernacular literature.⁵² Feng was the most active person of his time in collecting and revising the vernacular story (*huaben*), popular songs, redacted novels, and *chuanqi* dramas. He also compiled several collections of

⁵² Lu Shulun, *Feng Menglong yanjiu* (Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1982), pp. 24–25. For a biography of Feng Menglong, see the entry by Chao Tien-li in *DMB*, pp. 450–53. Patrick Hanan devotes two chapters to Feng’s life and ideas; see Hanan, *The Chinese Vernacular Story*, pp. 75–119. Wilt Idema gives a concise summary of Feng’s career and works in *Chinese Vernacular Fiction* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974), pp. 30–37. Notable studies of his life by Chinese scholars are a two-part article by Rong Zhaozu, “Feng Menglong di shengping jiqi zhushu kao,” *Lingnan xuebao* 2.2 (July 1931), 2.3 (July 1932); Lu Shulun, *Feng Menglong yanjiu* and his posthumous collected essays in *Feng Menglong san lun* (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 1987).

sanqu and a formulary (now lost), and edited a range of classical and vernacular genres; his publishing efforts intermingle literary moralism (the norm for his day and class) with profit-mindedness and a quest for novelty.

The present study is not intended as an intellectual biography of Feng Menglong; rather, it attempts the humbler task of situating his two popular song collections within the Ming publishing boom and in the context of the intellectual and social changes of the period 1550 to 1650.⁵³ Feng used popular songs to illustrate the value of genuineness (*zhen*), which was an almost spiritual concern for the elite who collected vernacular materials and who were eager to show how language and ideas emanated from the natural self (see Chapter 4).

Yet Feng also clearly capitalized on the demand for songs in print and created a role for himself as the arbiter of clever ways for structuring verses and choosing phrases. In addition, he showcased the intellectual merits of popular songs, alternately likening them to popular idiom and to the high literate tradition. For example, he recommended a song about suffering for love, entitled “Misfortune” (*Bu couqiao* 不湊巧), as an elaboration of another song entitled “Conditioned Dharma” (*Yuanfa* 緣法, that is, the Buddhist law that a relationship is shaped or predestined by actions in a former life):

Whether we are predestined—that depends on your bearing and looks.
Whether we are predestined—that depends on the start and end of
your liaison.

Whether we are predestined—that depends on coin and paper currency.
If it is predestined, two will meet across thousands of *li*.

If it is not predestined, two will be distant when they are face to face.
Though I use all (*yong jin*) of my wiles,

Still I need conditioned dharma to make my fortune.

(*Guazhi'er*, 1: 2b)

⁵³ I am indebted to a number of studies that specifically concern the song collections. Fu Yunzi, “Guazhi'er yu Pipo yu,” in his *Baichuan ji* (Taipei; originally Tokyo, 1943); Guan Dedong, “Feng Menglong jijì di *Guazhi'er*,” in his *Quyì lunjì* (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe 1958), pp. 175–81; and idem, 1961 Preface to *Guazhi'er* and 1962 Preface to *Shan'ge*, included in *Ming Qing min'ge shudiao ji* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1987; originally Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), vol. 1; Li Ping, “Feng Menglong yu Mingdai min'ge,” *Minjian wenyi jikan* 3 (1982): 207–21; Ōki Yasushi, “Fū Bōryū no ‘Sanka’ ko,” *TBK* no. 105 (1988); idem, “Sokukyō shō *Kakiji* ni tsuite—Fū Bōryū ‘Sanka’ no kenkyū busho,” *TBK* no. 107 (1988); and the expanded annotation in idem, *Fū Bōryū “Sanka” no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Keiso shōbō, 2003).

有緣那在容和貌。◦
 有緣那在前後相交。◦
 有緣那在錢和鈔。◦
 有緣千里會。無緣對面遙。◦
 用盡心機也。◦
 也要緣法來湊巧。◦

(The small type indicates small characters in the original, often termed “padding words,” that alter the number of syllables that is the formal requirement in a verse line—in this case, expanding the five-syllable line. The translation preserves the word order in order to show the placement of these interpolated words.)

“That explains it *all*” (*shuo jin le* 說盡了) Feng comments, echoing the female speaker’s vow in the penultimate line to “use *all* my wiles” (*yong jin xinji* 用盡心機) to get a lover. Yet Feng follows “Conditioned Dharma” with a song called “Misfortune” (*Bu couqiao* 不湊巧) that expands on the preceding song-text and proves his own views:

My perfume has faded and jade [limbs] have wasted away—for whom?
 Forgetting to sleep or eat, while waiting for someone to come?
 My spirit is exhausted and dreams are torn, with nothing to live for.
 These few instances of misfortune
 Are no less than the workings of my fate.
 You see on the opposite bank [of the stream] is a peach tree in bloom.
 Tell me, how can I find a way to go over to pick one?

(*Guazhi'er*, 1: 3)

香消玉滅為誰害。◦
 廢寢忘食為着誰來。◦
 魂勞夢斷無聊賴。◦
 幾番不湊巧。◦
 也是我命安排。◦
 你看隔岸上的桃花也。◦
 教我怎生樣去採。◦

Feng Menglong comments: “This is quite elegant! It could serve as a short footnote to the verse [preceding it] entitled ‘Conditioned Dharma.’”⁵⁴ The second song is a cloying description of suffering

⁵⁴ References to Feng Menglong’s popular song collections *Guazhi'er* and *Shan'ge* throughout are to the modern reprints in Guan Dedong and Zhao Jingshen, eds., *Ming Qing min'ge shidiao ji*, vol. 1 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1987; originally Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959, 1961, and 1962).

for love, which the female speaker declares is fated and inevitable. However, the image of peach blossoms (*taohua* 桃花; often likened to the creamy skin and rouged cheeks of a courtesan) and invitation in the closing line to counter fate by seeking a way to cross to the opposite bank introduce one of Feng's favorite themes—that is, the possibility of rising above one's social station and one's fate through individual initiative. The arrangement and annotation of songs thus furnish a way for him to rail against the prevailing notion of a fate, or conditioned dharma, that is fixed even before birth. However, the peach petals in the song catch the speaker's eye and facilitate a playful treatment of the notion that one can change one's fate, not a diatribe on the subject. The peach flower tantalizes the listener (who is brought into direct relation to the text by the use of the first-person feminine voice) by evoking the delicate beauty of a courtesan who might sing just such a song as this, coyly calling the listener to her aid.

Elsewhere, Feng compares the erotic puns in one of the first texts for *Mountain Songs*, entitled "A Glimpse" (discussed in Chapter 5), to the double entendre in an untitled poem by the High Tang poet Li Shangyin (813–858).⁵⁵ Such references to the high literary tradition flatter the reader without demanding interpretive skill. This kind of annotation is wholly unrelated to performance practice, yet did much to influence how readers were exposed to Confucian teachings and also encouraged them to select phrases from the song-texts for their own purposes and to feel free to alter the wording.

The contradictions in Feng Menglong's life and work are embodied in his arrangement of and commentary on popular songs, which veer from didacticism to crude humor. His comments, written in simple vernacular, both accommodate less skilled readers and engage those with full classical literacy in a critique of orthodox literary values and practices, institutions, and social types (such as the self-styled recluses, known as *shanren*, whom Feng viewed as objects of ridicule). These were as much contradictions of Feng's time as of his per-

⁵⁵ Feng Menglong comments on the double entendre in the *Shan'ge* (1: 1b). James Liu notes the resemblance of the lines from Li Shangyin's "Untitled" (*Wuti*) to the anonymous Six Dynasties songs *Ziye ge*: "The spring silkworm's thread will end only when death comes; When the candle has turned to ashes its tears will dry"; see *Yuxisheng shi ji jianzhu*, annot. Feng Hao, juan 2 (Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1999), p. 399; see James J. Y. Liu, trans. *The Poetry of Li Shangyin* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), p. 67.

sonality and oeuvre. Further, the ingenious readings Feng devised for popular song-texts are very much in line with commercial printers' and commentators' practices of objectification, systemization, and dissociation of texts from historical and social context (what Paul Ricoeur terms "distanciation of the text") that invited readers to appropriate (to "make their own") and to receive an enlarged self through the encounter with the world of texts.⁵⁶ Feng was regarded as a humorous writer rather than as a gifted poet. As Zhu Yizun put it, "His Honor excelled in setting colorful language to doggerel verse."⁵⁷ In what follows I show how Feng's popular song collections drew together a broad variety of texts from commercial publications, elite imitations, courtesan compositions, and other sources, adding commentary to engage readers in a new and direct dialogue in which the Feng-the-editor holds center stage.

⁵⁶ See Ricoeur, "Appropriation," in idem, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action, and Interpretation*, ed., trans., and introduced by John B. Thompson (Maison des Sciences de l'Homme and Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 182–93.

⁵⁷ Zhu Yizun, *Ming shi zong* (Taipei: Shijie shuju, 1962), 71: 23ab. Qian Qianyi (1582–1664) omits Feng Menglong's work from the vast compendium of Ming-dynasty *shi* poetry entitled *Liechao shiji*; see *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1983).