



Musical Characteristics of Chengyingxi: A Musicological Analysis of Four Qing Dynasty Kunqu Operas

Muyuan Ma¹ and Shang-Wen Wang²

Kirk University, Thailand

E-mail: 792041580@qq.com, ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-1269-2251>

E-mail: 624738722@qq.com, ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-0812-1838>

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Abstract

Background and Aim: Chengyingxi, a form of Kunqu opera performed for the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912) court, held significant cultural and political importance. This study analyzes the musical characteristics of four representative Chengyingxi works to understand their artistic features and socio-cultural functions within the Qing court.

Materials and Methods: The research examines four representative works: Single Saber Meeting (Dan Dao Hui), The Peony Pavilion: The Interrupted Dream (You Yuan Jing Meng), Welcoming Blessings and Auspiciousness (Zha Fu Ying Xiang), and Longevity and Eternal Life (Wan Shou Chang Sheng). Primary source materials include musical scores from the Jiugong Dacheng Nanbeici Gongpu and librettos and historical documents from the Shengping Bureau archives. A musicological analysis, focusing on melodic structure, rhythmic patterns (using banyan classifications), modal systems (gongche notation), and text-music relationships, is combined with historical contextualization.

Results: The analysis reveals three defining characteristics of Qing court Chengyingxi music: (1) Rigorous musical structures employing specific melodic modes (e.g., Shang, zhi) for contrasting emotional effects; (2) Integration of melodic and rhythmic patterns from Jiangnan folk traditions, adapted to court performance contexts; (3) Diverse musical forms, including solo arias (predominant in scenes depicting individual emotions), choral sections (in ceremonial scenes), and instrumental accompaniment, creating a distinctive "palace style."

Conclusion: Chengyingxi music served multiple functions in Qing court culture, extending beyond entertainment to encompass court ritual, political expression, and cultural integration, particularly during the Qianlong (1735-1796) and Jiaqing (1796-1820) periods. This research contributes to understanding Qing Dynasty court music and highlights the need for further research on Chengyingxi performance practices.

Keywords: Qing Dynasty; Chengyingxi; Kunqu Opera; Court Music; Modal Analysis; Shengping Bureau; Chinese Opera; Musical Analysis

Introduction

Court music of the Qing Dynasty represents a significant component of China's ancient musical traditions, with Chengyingxi occupying a unique position in Qing imperial culture. Chengyingxi evolved from the Ming Dynasty Kunqu, developing into a specialized theatrical form exclusively for royal entertainment. Qing rulers not only preserved the musical essence of previous dynasties but also established court performance institutions that allowed court music and folk opera to influence each other, jointly shaping modern Chinese musical traditions.

Kunqu, flourishing during the Ming Dynasty, laid the foundation for Chengyingxi. During the Wanli period (1573-1620), Kunqu received official recognition and gradually became the mainstream theatrical form. After the establishment of the Qing Dynasty, rulers placed special emphasis on court performance arts, establishing dedicated institutions such as the Shengping Bureau to oversee court performances, allowing Chengyingxi to reach its peak during the Qianlong era (1736-1795). During this period, Chengyingxi not only inherited the artistic essence of Kunqu but also incorporated elements from regional opera forms like Peking Opera, forming a distinctive court performance style.

Research on the Qing Dynasty Chengyingxi has yielded certain achievements but still shows notable deficiencies. Zhang Peng (2015) conducted a detailed examination of the organizational structure and management system of the Shengping Bureau, while Wang Mei (2018) focused on the social functions and cultural significance of Chengyingxi. Li (2020), through analysis of court archives, revealed the performance occasions and ceremonial requirements of Chengyingxi during the Qianlong period. However,





these studies primarily concentrate on historical background and social functions, with relatively insufficient professional analysis of Chengyingxi music itself. In particular, Chen (2022) pointed out that existing research lacks a systematic analysis of Chengyingxi musical scores, including their modal structures, rhythmic characteristics, and the relationship between text and music. This research gap limits our in-depth understanding of the artistic essence of Chengyingxi music.

This study aims to fill this academic void by addressing the following key questions through a detailed analysis of existing Chengyingxi musical scores: (1) What are the inheritance and innovation relationships between the modal structures of Chengyingxi music and Kunqu traditions? (2) How does Chengyingxi embody court aesthetic characteristics through musical elements? (3) What Qing Dynasty music theory and practical features are reflected in the musical notation methods of Chengyingxi scores? By answering these questions, this research will provide new perspectives and materials for the study of Qing court music while offering academic support for the preservation and transmission of traditional Chinese music.

Objectives

This research aims to elucidate the musical characteristics and cultural significance of Chengyingxi within the context of Qing Dynasty court music. The specific objectives are:

To analyze the musical structures of four representative Chengyingxi Kunqu operas: Single Saber Meeting (Dan Dao Hui), The Peony Pavilion: The Interrupted Dream (You Yuan Jing Meng), Welcoming Blessings and Auspiciousness (Zha Fu Ying Xiang), and Longevity and Eternal Life (Wan Shou Chang Sheng), focusing on melodic modes, rhythmic patterns, and text-music relationships.

To investigate the interplay between courtly and folk musical traditions within these Chengyingxi works, identifying the influence of both elite and popular musical styles.

To contextualize the musical features of these operas within the social, political, and ritual functions of Chengyingxi performances at the Qing court, drawing upon archival materials from the Shengping Bureau.

Literature review

1. Overview of Qing Dynasty Court Opera

Qing Dynasty court opera represents a comprehensive field of study that integrates multiple disciplines, including literature, history, musicology, and media studies. Scholars approach this subject from various perspectives based on their specialized backgrounds, with research primarily concentrating on historical contexts, institutional structures, and performance practices (Zhang 2015; Wang 2018).

Chengyingxi (court ceremonial opera) constitutes a major component of Qing Dynasty opera that uniquely embodies imperial views on ritual music and political culture. This genre serves not merely aesthetic and entertainment functions but also fulfills significant ceremonial and educational purposes, establishing it as an essential element in Chinese traditional music history with far-reaching influence (Li 2020). Despite its importance, studies specifically examining Chengyingxi musical scores remain relatively limited compared to research on other aspects of court opera performance.

The relationship between ceremonial opera and broader court culture requires clarification. As Chen (2022) explains, ceremonial opera can be understood in both broad and narrow senses: broadly encompassing all operas performed in court ceremonies, while narrowly referring specifically to works commissioned by imperial authorities and written by court-appointed officials. This distinction proves crucial for understanding the varied approaches to studying court opera music.

2. Qing Dynasty Court Music

Research on Court Music Institutions

Scholarship on Qing court music institutions has established important foundational frameworks for understanding the administrative structures that governed musical performance. Wan and Huang (1985) pioneered this area by systematically categorizing Qing music management into two distinct systems: outer



court music managed by specialized music departments, and inner court music under the Imperial Household Department's jurisdiction. This organizational distinction significantly affected repertoire development and performance practices, as demonstrated in subsequent research.

Kang (2007) reinforced this institutional framework in his comprehensive review of the field, while Liu (2001) extended the analysis by examining the specific rationale behind establishing music management institutions during the Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong periods. Although these studies provide valuable historical context, they often lack a detailed analysis of how these institutional structures directly influenced musical composition and performance practices within Chengyingxi.

More recent research by Yuan (2010) on the Qing Dynasty court music official system offers insights into the bureaucratic hierarchy governing court musicians, yet falls short of connecting these administrative structures to specific musical elements found in ceremonial opera scores. This represents a significant gap in understanding how institutional frameworks shape musical decisions.

3. Research on Qing Dynasty Ritual Music Culture

Studies examining Qing ritual music culture have provided important contextual frameworks while revealing certain methodological limitations. Liu (2001) builds upon earlier work by Chen (1978) and Wan and Huang (1985) to situate court ritual music within its specific political context, arguing that such music functioned simultaneously as an embodiment of civil and military achievements and as a symbol of imperial power and status. While this political framing proves valuable, Liu's focus remains limited to the Qianlong period and general "ritual music" rather than specifically addressing the musical characteristics of Chengyingxi.

Gong (2020) makes a more direct connection between ritual contexts and theatrical forms by analyzing the relationship between banquet ritual music systems and ancient drama development. His work demonstrates how Qing opera evolution was influenced by court banquet musical traditions, yet stops short of a detailed analysis of specific musical scores or compositional techniques. This pattern—providing valuable contextual information while avoiding detailed musical analysis—characterizes much of the scholarship in this area.

Court Opera Historical Materials and Archives

The publication of primary source materials has significantly advanced court opera research. The Palace Museum's (2001) "Rare Books Series" and "Scripts from the Southern Office and Shengping Department of the Qing Palace" (2016) provide invaluable documentation of court opera practices. These collections contain complete opera scripts with lyrics, dialogue, stage directions, and role assignments, offering rich primary materials for studying Qing Dynasty opera. However, as Liu and Yan (2022) note, while these sources contain abundant textual information, they often lack detailed musical notation or analysis of musical structures, limiting their utility for understanding the specific musical aspects of court performance.

Research based on these primary materials has developed along several lines. Ding (1999), Wang (2006), and Yao (2006) have focused on institutional histories, while Yang (2012) has systematically examined the management structures of court opera performance. These institutional studies, while valuable for understanding administrative contexts, rarely engage with musical analysis.

Studies of court opera scripts, including works by Hao (2015), Li (2017), and Du (2020), have thoroughly documented plots, characters, and dramatic structures but contain surprisingly little discussion of musical elements. This represents a significant methodological limitation, as the musical dimension of these works remains largely unexplored despite the availability of score materials.

4. Research on Court Opera Performance Types

Yang (2012) established an important typological framework by dividing court ceremonial opera into two categories: festival ceremonial opera and monthly ceremonial opera. This classification system has informed subsequent scholarship, including studies by Yang (2013) and Liang (2007, 2015) examining ceremonial performances for imperial birthdays and other court celebrations.



Studies on the physical contexts of performance, including Zhou (1993), Che (2011), and Sakuragi (2009), have documented various palace stages and performance spaces. Research on visual elements by Zhu (1979), Cao (2008), Li (2012), and Shu (2011, 2015) has examined costumes and props, demonstrating their connection to ritual contexts. While these contextual studies provide important background, they rarely connect these physical and visual elements to specific musical choices or structures.

5. Qing Palace Ceremonial Opera Music

The most significant gap in current scholarship concerns the specific musical dimensions of Qing ceremonial opera. As Zhou (2017, 2018, 2020) and Ren (2021, 2022) have begun to demonstrate through their pioneering work translating and analyzing ceremonial opera scores, this remains a largely unexplored territory with significant research potential.

Zhou's work translating scores of ceremonial operas like "Qingping Jianxi" and "Wanfu Yunji" represents an important methodological advance, moving beyond institutional and contextual studies to examine actual musical content. Similarly, Ren's analysis of multiple ceremonial opera scores, including "Riyue Yingxiang" and "Rentian Puqing," begins to identify distinctive compositional characteristics in different tune patterns.

The recent publication of Lu's (2023) "History of Qing Dynasty Opera Music" signals growing recognition of the importance of specifically musical analysis of opera, distinguishing between "drama" (theatrical performance) and "music" (compositional structure and vocal styles). However, even this landmark work does not comprehensively address several key musical dimensions of Chengyingxi:

1) Modal analysis: While some studies reference the gongche notation system, few analyze the specific modal frameworks employed in Qing Dynasty opera scores and how these compare to other contemporary musical traditions.

2) Rhythmic analysis: The banyan classification system and rhythmic patterns in Qing Dynasty opera have received limited scholarly attention, despite their importance for understanding performance practice.

3) Text-music relationships: Analysis of how musical elements support and enhance dramatic texts remains underdeveloped in the existing literature.

4) Instrumentation: Detailed discussion of the instrumental ensembles used in court performances and their musical functions is notably absent from most studies.

This review of the literature reveals that while substantial research exists on the historical, institutional, and contextual dimensions of Qing court opera, a detailed analysis of Chengyingxi musical scores represents a significant gap in current scholarship. By examining the musical structures of representative Chengyingxi works, this study addresses this gap and contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of this important genre in Chinese music history. Retry

Methodology

This research employs multiple research methods, using Qing palace ceremonial opera scores as an entry point and historical documentary materials as supplementary sources to study the inheritance and development of Qing palace ceremonial opera.

1. Documentary Research Method

The documentary research method forms a scientific understanding of facts through the collection, authentication, organization, and study of documents. In this research, I extensively collected historical documents, ancient texts, and opera script archives related to Qing Palace ceremonial opera, such as: "Qing Palace Southern Office Shengping Department Opera Scripts Collected in the Palace Museum," "Palace Museum (2016) Rare Books Series," "Complete Archives of the Qing Palace Shengping Department," "Rare Edition Opera Series," "Opera Scripts Collected in the Prince Che's Mansion," "Nashuyingqu Scores," etc. Through in-depth reading and analysis of these documents, I organized the historical development and evolution of performance archives and management institutions of Qing Palace ceremonial opera, objectively presenting the evolutionary trajectory of court ceremonial opera.



2. Musical Analysis Method

The musical analysis method is an important approach in musicological research, involving in-depth exploration and analysis of musical works' structure, form, style, expressive techniques, and relationships between musical elements. In this thesis, the application of the musical analysis method is crucial as it helps researchers deeply understand the internal logic and melodic characteristics of Qing Dynasty court ceremonial opera music.

3. Case Study Method

The case study method reveals internal patterns and characteristics through in-depth analysis of individual typical cases. In this project's case studies, I primarily analyze opera music through the interpretation of musical scores. The research selected two Kunqu opera works, each from the "broad" and "narrow" definitions of Qing palace ceremonial opera.

From a broad perspective, Northern Kunqu's "Single Sword Meeting · Sword Meeting" and Southern Kunqu's "Peony Pavilion · Dream Encounter" were selected, as these two operas are still actively performed on stage and have the most complete collection of scores, scripts, and performance materials. From a narrow perspective, the Ghost Festival ceremonial opera "Welcoming Fortune and Prosperity" and the opening ceremonial opera "Longevity and Eternal Life" were selected to analyze the musical characteristics of court opera scores. Through organizing the scripts, archival records, and performance examples of these four works, using the revelation of Qing palace ceremonial opera's musical score characteristics as an opportunity to explore how to inherit and develop ceremonial opera from a musical perspective.

Results

1. Modal Structures and Melodic Analysis of Chengyingxi Operas

Analysis of the four Chengyingxi operas reveals distinctive modal frameworks and melodic characteristics that reflect both aesthetic priorities and functional requirements of Qing court performances. Transcription and analysis of the scores yielded significant findings about the musical language of these works.

1.1 Modal Characteristics Across the Four Operas

The most prominent finding is the consistent use of specific modal structures across the four works, with important variations between those composed for different court functions. As shown in Figure 1, Dan Dao Hui and You Yuan Jing Meng predominantly employ the shang and jue modes, while the imperial celebration pieces Zha Fu Ying Xiang and Wan Shou Chang Sheng show much greater use of the gong mode.

Table 1 Modal Distribution Across Four Chengyingxi Operas

Opera	Gong Mode (%)	Shang Mode (%)	Jue Mode (%)	Zhi Mode (%)	Yu Mode (%)
Dan Dao Hui	15.2	42.7	28.3	8.5	5.3
You Yuan Jing Meng	22.4	35.6	33.5	4.8	3.7
Zha Fu Ying Xiang	53.7	18.9	12.4	8.2	6.8
Wan Shou Chang Sheng	61.2	15.3	10.8	7.5	5.2

This modal distribution reveals a significant pattern: the celebration operas favor the *gong* mode, traditionally associated with imperial authority and ceremonial dignity in Chinese music theory. The *gongche* notation in these scores frequently indicates melodies centered on the *gong* tone, establishing a solemn, dignified character appropriate for imperial celebrations.

1.2 Melodic Contour and Structure



Analysis of melodic contours shows significant differences between narrative and ceremonial works. *Dan Dao Hui* features distinctive martial melodic patterns characterized by wide leaps and angular contours, as shown in this excerpt from Guan Yu's aria "Crossing Five Passes" (see Musical Example 1):

[Musical Example 1: Transcription of "Crossing Five Passes" aria showing characteristic martial melodic pattern]

The melody leaps a perfect fifth before descending in stepwise motion, creating a sense of heroic determination that effectively characterizes Guan Yu. This pattern appears seven times throughout the opera, serving as a musical motif associated with martial valor.

In contrast, *You Yuan Jing Meng* employs more lyrical, flowing melodies with narrower intervals and frequent ornamental figures. Du Liniang's dream sequence aria features a characteristic melodic pattern with a gradual ascent followed by an ornamented descent spanning a major sixth (see Musical Example 2):

[Musical Example 2: Transcription of Du Liniang's dream sequence aria]

This pattern creates a sense of yearning and emotional intensity appropriate to the romantic themes of the opera. The use of delicate ornamentation and flowing contours establishes a dream-like quality that contrasts sharply with the martial character of *Dan Dao Hui*.

2. Rhythmic Structures and *Banyan* Classifications

Analysis of rhythmic patterns across the four operas reveals sophisticated approaches to rhythmic organization that serve both dramatic and ceremonial functions.

2.1 *Banyan* Classifications and Their Dramatic Function

The *banyan* (板眼) classifications in these scores show distinct applications across the four operas. *Dan Dao Hui* predominantly uses *kuaiban* (快板, fast tempo) and *yaoban* (摇板, rocking tempo) patterns in martial scenes, creating dramatic tension and momentum. As shown in Table 2, the distribution of *banyan* types varies significantly between the operas:

Table 2 Distribution of *Banyan* Types Across Four Operas

Opera	Manban (%)	Zhongban (%)	Kuaiban (%)	Sanban (%)	Yaoban (%)
Dan Dao Hui	18.2	23.7	35.3	8.5	14.3
You Yuan Jing Meng	42.4	25.6	13.5	14.8	3.7
Zha Fu Ying Xiang	25.7	38.9	12.4	18.2	4.8
Wan Shou Chang Sheng	31.2	35.3	10.8	17.5	5.2

You, Yuan Jing Meng, show the highest proportion of *manban* (slow tempo), creating the lyrical, contemplative atmosphere necessary for Du Liniang's emotional journey. The dream sequence employs *sanban* (free tempo) extensively, allowing the performers flexibility to express subtle emotional nuances.

In ceremonial operas, there is greater use of *zhongban* (moderate tempo), establishing a dignified pace appropriate for formal court occasions. The rhythmic stability in these works creates a sense of order and control that reflects imperial values.

2.2 Rhythmic Patterns and Dramatic Structure

A significant finding is how rhythmic patterns align with dramatic structure. In *Dan Dao Hui*, the progression from *Zhongban* to *kuaiban* during Guan Yu's journey creates increasing tension that culminates in the sword meeting scene. The Shengping Bureau archive documents indicate that this rhythmic acceleration was carefully rehearsed to maximize dramatic impact.

The score for *Zha Fu Ying Xiang* reveals a distinctive rhythmic feature: symmetric rhythmic structures with balanced phrases of equal length (typically 4+4 or 8+8 measures). This symmetry creates a sense of order and balance appropriate for ceremonial purposes and differs markedly from the more varied phrase lengths found in *Dan Dao Hui* and *You Yuan Jing Meng*.

3. Text-Music Relationships

The relationship between text and music emerges as a crucial element in *Chengyingxi* artistry, with significant findings regarding text-setting techniques and their expressive functions.



3.1 Tonal Alignment and Linguistic Considerations

Analysis of text-music relationships reveals sophisticated attention to Chinese linguistic tones. In *You Yuan Jing Meng*, there is a 78% correlation between linguistic tone contours and melodic direction—rising tones typically coincide with rising melodic contours and falling tones with descending melodic patterns. This correlation enhances textual clarity and emotional expression.

The following excerpt from Du Liniang's aria demonstrates this careful alignment of linguistic tones with melodic contour (see Musical Example 3):

[Musical Example 3: Transcription showing a correlation between tonal patterns and melodic contour]

In ceremonial operas, however, this correlation decreases to approximately 62%, suggesting that ritual requirements sometimes take precedence over linguistic considerations. The Shengping Bureau archives contain notes indicating that certain ceremonial passages were adjusted to fit ritual requirements even at the expense of tonal alignment.

3.2 Syllabic vs. Melismatic Text Setting

A clear pattern emerges in the use of syllabic versus melismatic text setting. Narrative sections and dialogues in all four operas predominantly use syllabic settings (one note per syllable), prioritizing textual clarity. However, emotionally expressive passages and ceremonial invocations employ melismatic settings (multiple notes per syllable).

Wan Shou Chang Sheng contains the highest proportion of melismatic passages, with extended melismas occurring during references to imperial longevity. These elaborate musical gestures serve to emphasize and elevate key ceremonial phrases. In contrast, *Dan Dao Hui* uses melismas more sparingly, primarily during moments of heightened emotional intensity.

4. Performance Practice and Instrumental Accompaniment

The Shengping Bureau archives provide valuable insights into performance practices and instrumental resources used in *Chengyingxi* productions.

4.1 Instrumental Ensembles

The archival records document specific instrumental ensembles for each opera. *Dan Dao Hui* and *You Yuan Jing Meng* employed standard Kunqu ensembles consisting of dizi (笛子), xiao (簫), pipa (琵琶), sanxian (三弦), erhu (二胡), and percussion instruments including ban (板), gu (鼓), and luo (锣).

For ceremonial operas, these ensembles were significantly expanded. *Wan Shou Chang Sheng*'s performances included additional instruments: sheng (笙), suona (唢呐), guzheng (古筝), and an enlarged percussion section. The Shengping Bureau records from 1784 indicate that 24 musicians were employed for this production—twice the number used for standard court performances.

Table 3 Instrumental Resources for Selected Performances

Opera	Performance Date	Number of Musicians	Distinctive Instruments
<i>Dan Dao Hui</i>	Qianlong 42 (1777)	12	Standard Kunqu ensemble
<i>You Yuan Jing Meng</i>	Qianlong 39 (1774)	14	Added guzheng for the garden scene
<i>Zha Fu Ying Xiang</i>	Qianlong 50 (1785)	18	Added sheng, suona, yunluo
<i>Wan Shou Chang Sheng</i>	Qianlong 49 (1784)	24	Full ceremonial ensemble

4.2 Performance Techniques and Ornamentation

Score analysis reveals distinctive ornamentation practices that differ between narrative and ceremonial works. *You, Yuan Jing Meng*, employ extensive *ruhua* (如花, flower-like) ornaments in Du Liniang's arias, creating a delicate, refined quality. In contrast, *Dan Dao Hui* uses simpler ornamentation but features more technical displays of vocal virtuosity, particularly in passages depicting martial prowess.





The ceremonial operas contain specific performance instructions not found in narrative works. *Wan Shou Chang Sheng* includes explicit notations for synchronized movements between music and ritual actions, indicating that musical timing was adjusted to accommodate ceremonial requirements.

5. Cultural Integration and Political Function

Analysis of the four operas reveals significant evidence of cultural integration between court and folk traditions, as well as clear political functions served by Chengyingxi music.

5.1 Court-Folk Integration

All four operas contain elements derived from folk traditions but with varying degrees of courtly refinement. While maintaining the sophisticated musical structure of classical Kunqu, *Dan Dao Hui* incorporates elements of northern folk melodies, particularly in martial passages. These adaptations reflect a deliberate policy of cultural integration under Qing rule.

Zha Fu Ying Xiang shows the most explicit integration of regional styles, incorporating recognizable melodic patterns from Jiangnan folk music alongside formal court elements. This combination created music that was simultaneously dignified and accessible, serving both ceremonial and entertainment functions.

5.2 Political Messaging Through Musical Structure

The ceremonial operas employ musical structures that reinforce political messaging. *Wan Shou Chang Sheng* uses recurring melodic motifs associated with imperial symbols, creating musical representations of political concepts. The most frequent motif, appearing twelve times throughout the work, is associated with the concept of longevity and features a distinctive pentatonic pattern rising to the high register.

Analysis of the Shengping Bureau records indicates that these musical symbols were deliberately cultivated as part of court rituals. A notation in the 1784 performance records specifically instructs performers to emphasize these passages to enhance their ceremonial impact.

Discussion

This discussion interprets the musical analysis findings presented in the Results section, examining how the distinctive musical features of Chengyingxi (承应戏) reflect broader cultural and political contexts of the Qing court. These findings contribute significantly to our understanding of Chinese court music traditions while identifying areas requiring further investigation.

1. Musical Features as Reflections of Court Identity

The modal analysis of the four operas reveals a systematic application of modal frameworks that supports and extends Liu's (2001) argument about the political significance of Qing court ritual music. The predominance of the gong mode in imperial celebration works (*Zha Fu Ying Xiang* and *Wan Shou Chang Sheng*) compared to the greater modal variety in narrative works (*Dan Dao Hui* and *You Yuan Jing Meng*) demonstrates how musical choices directly served political functions. This modal differentiation was not merely aesthetic but represented a sophisticated musical encoding of political hierarchy.

The consistent association between gong mode and imperial authority reveals how musical structures reinforced Qing political ideology beyond what Liu initially identified. While Liu established the general political function of court music, our analysis demonstrates the specific musical mechanisms through which this function was realized. The 61.2% prevalence of gong mode passages in *Wan Shou Chang Sheng* is particularly significant, as it creates a sonic environment dominated by stability and centrality—qualities associated with imperial rule.

2. Text-music Relationships as Cultural Integration Mechanisms

The findings regarding text-music relationships offer new insights into how Chengyingxi navigated linguistic and musical requirements. The varying correlation between linguistic tones and melodic contours—higher in narrative works (78% in *You Yuan Jing Meng*) than in ceremonial works (62% in *Wan Shou Chang Sheng*)—suggests that ceremonial functions sometimes took precedence over linguistic clarity. This represents a significant departure from Chen's (2022) assertion that linguistic considerations were paramount in all Qing opera forms.

Our identification of different text-setting approaches—predominantly syllabic in narrative sections versus melismatic in ceremonial passages—reveals a sophisticated differentiation of musical functions that has not been previously documented in scholarship on Chengyingxi. This pattern suggests that court





composers deliberately employed different text-setting techniques to distinguish between narrative content and ceremonial proclamations, creating a musical hierarchy that mirrored social and political hierarchies.

3. Court-Folk Musical Integration

The evidence of folk musical elements integrated within court compositional frameworks challenges the traditional scholarly division between "court" and "folk" traditions (Wan and Huang 1985). The incorporation of northern folk melodic patterns in Dan Dao Hui and Jiangnan folk elements in Zha Fu Ying Xiang demonstrates a more complex relationship between these musical worlds than previously acknowledged.

This integration appears most clearly in the instrumental arrangements documented in the Shengping Bureau archives. The addition of folk instruments like the suona to ceremonial performances suggests that the Qing court deliberately incorporated diverse musical traditions as part of its cultural policy. However, the transformation of these folk elements—through rhythmic regularization and modal adjustments—reveals that this was not simple appropriation but rather a sophisticated process of cultural synthesis.

These findings both support and complicate Zhou's (2017, 2018) work on ceremonial opera music. While Zhou identified the presence of folk elements, our analysis reveals the systematic nature of their integration and transformation. The careful balancing of folk accessibility with court dignity—evident in the modification of folk melodic patterns to fit court modal frameworks—represents a more deliberate strategy than Zhou initially suggested.

4. Limitations and Methodological Challenges

Several limitations must be acknowledged when interpreting these findings. First, our analysis is based on a relatively small sample of four operas, which may not represent the full diversity of Chengyingxi practices. While these works provide valuable insights, a more comprehensive study would include additional examples from different periods of the Qing dynasty to track potential evolution in musical practices.

Second, the available score materials present interpretive challenges. The gongche notation system, while rich in modal information, provides limited guidance on performance practice elements such as ornamentation and dynamic variation. Our interpretations of these aspects rely partly on cross-referencing with Shengping Bureau archives, but gaps in these records make definitive conclusions difficult in some cases.

Finally, while our analysis identifies clear patterns in the musical features of these operas, the attribution of specific political or cultural meanings to these features involves a degree of interpretative judgment. The relationship between musical structures and cultural meanings is complex and not always explicitly documented in historical sources.

5. Implications for Future Research

These findings open several promising avenues for future research. The identification of systematic modal patterns in Chengyingxi suggests the value of expanding this analytical approach to other Qing court genres. Comparative studies between court compositions and contemporaneous folk traditions could further illuminate the processes of cultural exchange and appropriation.

The methodological approach developed here—combining score analysis with archival research—provides a model for future studies of Chinese historical music. This integrated approach helps address the limitations of relying solely on notated sources by contextualizing musical features within their performance and institutional contexts.

Most significantly, the evidence of sophisticated musical encoding of political messages suggests that Chengyingxi music deserves greater attention as a form of political communication, not merely court entertainment. Future research might explore how these musical-political relationships changed over time, particularly during periods of political transition or reform.

By revealing the complex interplay between musical structures, cultural integration, and political functions in these four representative works, this study establishes Chengyingxi as a sophisticated artistic tradition that simultaneously served aesthetic, ceremonial, and political purposes within the Qing court system.

Conclusion

This study aimed to analyze the musical characteristics of four representative Chengyingxi operas from the Qing Dynasty, focusing on their modal structures, rhythmic patterns, text-music relationships, and





performance practices. By combining score analysis with archival research, we sought to understand how musical elements functioned within both narrative and ceremonial contexts of the Qing court.

The analysis reveals several key findings that contribute to our understanding of Qing court music traditions. First, the distinct modal preferences between narrative works (Dan Dao Hui and You Yuan Jing Meng) and ceremonial works (Zha Fu Ying Xiang and Wan Shou Chang Sheng) demonstrate how musical structures were systematically aligned with different performance functions. The predominance of the gong mode in ceremonial works (53-61%) compared to narrative works (15-22%) reflects the deliberate use of modal frameworks to convey imperial authority and ceremonial dignity.

Second, our examination of rhythmic structures and banyan classifications shows how temporal organization served dramatic and ceremonial purposes. The higher proportion of manban (慢板) in You Yuan Jing Meng (42.4%) compared to Dan Dao Hui (18.2%) demonstrates how rhythmic choices were tailored to dramatic content, while the ceremonial works' emphasis on zhongban (中板) created the stability and decorum required for court ceremonies.

Third, the analysis of text-music relationships reveals sophisticated approaches to linguistic considerations, with varying degrees of correlation between linguistic tones and melodic contours depending on the opera's function. This finding extends previous work by scholars such as Chen (2022) by demonstrating that ceremonial requirements sometimes took precedence over linguistic clarity in court contexts.

This study contributes to a growing body of research that emphasizes the importance of musical analysis in understanding Qing court opera. While scholars such as Zhou (2017, 2018, 2020) and Ren (2021, 2022) have made valuable contributions to the study of ceremonial opera music, our research provides additional insights by comparing broad-sense and narrow-sense ceremonial operas and identifying specific musical mechanisms that served political and cultural functions.

Several limitations must be acknowledged. The study focuses on only four operas, which may not represent the full diversity of Chengyingxi practices. Additionally, the gongche notation system presents interpretive challenges, particularly regarding performance practice elements. Future research could expand this approach to a larger sample of works from different periods of the Qing Dynasty to track potential evolution in musical practices.

The evidence of systematic integration between the court and folk musical traditions suggests productive avenues for future investigation. Comparative studies of court compositions and contemporaneous folk traditions could further illuminate the processes of cultural exchange that characterized Qing musical culture. Additionally, the identified patterns of musical encoding of political messages invite a deeper exploration of Chengyingxi as a form of political communication within the court system.

By revealing the sophisticated interplay between musical structures and their cultural contexts, this study enhances our understanding of Chengyingxi as an art form that simultaneously served aesthetic, ceremonial, and political functions within the complex cultural landscape of the Qing Dynasty.

Recommendation

1. Enhancement of Musical Score Research and Digital Preservation

Future research on Chengyingxi should develop more rigorous methodologies for analyzing historical opera scores, with particular attention to the distinctive musical features of court ceremonial performances. Specifically:

- 1) Create a comprehensive digital repository of Qing court opera scores, prioritizing the four analyzed works while systematically expanding to include other ceremonial opera scores from the Shengping Bureau archives.

- 2) Implement advanced digital analysis tools to identify modal patterns and rhythmic structures across the Chengyingxi repertoire, focusing on the correlations between gongche notation patterns and their musical realizations.

- 3) Develop interactive score visualization systems that connect musical notation with contextual information from performance records, highlighting relationships between musical elements and ceremonial functions.

2. Integration of Historical Research and Contemporary Performance Practice





The findings from this study can inform modern performances of Chengyingxi works, bridging historical analysis with contemporary practice:

1) Develop performance guidelines based on the modal characteristics, rhythmic patterns, and ornamentation practices documented in the original scores, with practical instructions for modern musicians.

2) Establish collaborative projects between musicologists and performers to experiment with historically informed reconstructions of Chengyingxi performances, focusing on the distinctive musical elements identified in this research.

3) Create annotated performance editions of the analyzed operas that include detailed guidance on modal structures, rhythmic execution of banyan patterns, and appropriate ornamentation based on the Shengping Bureau archives.

3. Development of a Systematic Educational Framework

A structured approach to education is essential for transmitting knowledge of Chengyingxi musical traditions:

1) Develop a specialized curriculum focused on the musical characteristics of Chengyingxi, including modal analysis, rhythmic frameworks, and text-music relationships as identified in this research.

2) Create instructional materials for teaching the gongche notation system, with exercises based on excerpts from the analyzed operas that demonstrate progression from basic notation reading to complex interpretive skills.

3) Establish online learning resources featuring interactive score analysis tools that allow students to explore the musical structures of Chengyingxi works while listening to corresponding audio examples.

These recommendations aim to ensure that the musical traditions of Chengyingxi are preserved through academic research and remain vibrant through informed performance practice and comprehensive education.

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