

**THE VISUAL LANGUAGE OF ATTIRING:
FUNCTIONS OF BEIJING OPERA COSTUMES
IN THE QING COURT THEATER¹**

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ABSTRACT

During the Qianlong 乾隆 reign (1736-1796), the Qing court theater emerged a new type of play script, “Continuous Grand Play” (*liánběn dàxì* 连本大戏) or “Grand Play for Connected Theater” (*liántái dàxì* 连台大戏). In these grand plays, besides librettos, which consist of singing and speaking parts, and stage directions, they also include the details of theatrical costumes (*xíngtōu* 行头 or *xìyī* 戏衣) worn by each character in each scene. These costumes were exquisitely done with brilliant colors,

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gorgeous adornment, marvelous embroidery, unique designs, and excellent craftsmanship. The purpose of this paper is to use several types of theatrical costume pieces as a means to understand the visual language of the theatrical costumes employed in the gala performances during the Qianlong reign and the ways in which these theatrical attires “communicated” with the court audiences during the gala performances, which reflected the overall context of the court theater during the Qianlong era.

Keywords: *Qianlong, grand play, theatrical costume*

Introduction:

Chinese drama reached its pinnacle during the Qianlong 乾隆 reign (1736-1796), regarded as the golden era of Chinese theater. For the Qianlong emperor was an admirer and patron of theater performance. During his reign, he made so many contributions to Chinese drama. For instance, he fully developed organizations of two

significant court music bureaus— *Nán Fǔ* 南府 and *Jǐng Shān* 景山, which were erected during the Kangxi 康熙 emperor. Besides *Nán Fǔ* and *Jǐng Shān*, in the seventh year of the Qianlong reign (1742) the Qianlong emperor also commanded the establishment of the Divine Music Monastery (*Shényuè Guān* 神乐关) to be in charge of performances in the imperial sacrificial ceremony, the Hesheng Office (*Héshēng Shǔ* 和声署) and the Entertainment Office (*Zhǎngyí Sī* 掌仪司) in charge of performances in court banquets (Ding, 1999: 9-14). But perhaps his major contribution would be the emergence of *Jīngjù* 京剧 or Beijing opera; an intermarriage of various regional dramatic styles such as *Píhuáng* 皮黄, *Kūnqǔ* 昆曲, *Xīpí* 西皮 and *Erhuáng* 二黄 (Lang, 2001: 14-19; Makerras, 1975: 94-97; Zhao, 2001: 8-9).

During the Qianlong reign, the Qing court theater also emerged various types of new play scripts. One of the most unique forms was called “Continuous Grand Play” (*liánběn dàxì* 连本大戏) or “Grand Play for Connected Theater” (*liántái dàxì* 连台大戏). This “Grand Play” refers to the play adapted and rewritten from classic novels by court dramatists during the Qianlong reign. Every grand play is divided into ten volumes; each volume contains twenty-four acts, thus two hundred and forty acts in total. A performance of a grand play could last more than ten days. During the Qianlong era, there were at least six grand plays recorded in the history: *A Golden Ledger for the Promotion of Kindness* (*Quànshàn Jīnkē* 劝善金科, hereafter *QSJK*),³ *The Precious Raft of the Peaceful Times*

³ It is an adaptation play of the story *Mulian Saves His Mother in Hell* (*Mùlián Jiù Mǔ* 目莲救母).

(*Shēngpíng Bǎofá* 升平宝筏, hereafter *SPBF*),⁴ *The Annals of the Three Kingdoms* (*Dǐngzhì Chūnqiū* 鼎峙春秋, hereafter *DZCQ*),⁵ *A Diagram of the Stars of Loyalty and Righteousness* (*Zhōngyì Xuántú* 忠义璇图, hereafter *ZYXT*),⁶ *The Flute Music of the Prosperous Era* (*Zhāodài Xiāosháo* 昭代箫韶, hereafter *ZDXS*),⁷ and *Investiture of Gods* (*Fēngshén Tiānbǎng* 封神天榜, hereafter *FSTB*).⁸

These grand plays were scripted for gala performances on the “three-tiered stage” (*chóngtái sāncéng* 崇台三层), an innovation of Chinese theatrical architecture during the Qianlong reign (Fig. 1) (Lang, 2001: 91; Li, 1998: 18;

⁴ It is an adaptation play of the story *Journey to the West* (*Xīyóu Jì* 西游记).

⁵ It is an adaptation play of the story *Three Kingdoms* (*Sānguó Yǎnyì* 三国演义).

⁶ It is an adaptation play of the story *Water Margin* (*Shuǐhǔ Zhuàn* 水浒传).

⁷ It is an adaptation play of the story *Family of Yang Generals* (*Yángjiā Jiàng* 杨家将).

⁸ It is an adaptation play of the story *Investiture of Gods* (*Fēngshén Yǎnyì* 封神演义).

Liao, 1997: 138; Petcharapiruch, 2008; Yu, 2003: 445; Zhao, 2001: 22; Zhu, 1999: 550).

In these grand plays, besides librettos, which consist of singing and speaking parts, and stage directions, they also include the details of theatrical costumes (*xíngtōu* 行头 or *xìyī* 戏衣) worn by each character in each scene. For instance, the twelfth act of the first volume of the *SPBF*, entitled “Arriving in the imperial city to submit an impeachment” (*Yìjiàng què jiāojìn dànzhang* 诤绛阙交进弹章) tells a story of Sun Wukong descending under the ocean to request for troops and weapons from the Dragon King. The Dragon King then ascended to the Heaven to report a situation and to ask for the Heavenly troops to attack his enemy. To perform this scene on the three-tiered stage:

Miscellaneous actors costumed as sixteen Heavenly generals enter the Longevity Stage by using an entrance door of the Immortal Tower. They act out separating to attend.

Miscellaneous actors costumed as four Heavenly ministers wearing court caps, python robes, belts and carry tablets. Miscellaneous actors costumed as four ministers of the Constellation; miscellaneous actors costumed as four Luminous Appearance Consorts, four court officials, Golden Lad and Jade Maiden enter the Fortune Stage.

Miscellaneous actors costumed as A Thousand-Eyed God, Obedient Ear God, four masters who are Lord Ma, Lord Zhao, Lord Wen, and Lord Guan; miscellaneous actors costumed as twelve

civil and military attendants enter the Prosperity Stage.

Miscellaneous actors costumed as the Dragon Kings wearing Dragon King caps, python robes, belts and carrying tablets.

A crown actor costumed as Lord of the Imperial City wearing a gemmed crown, python robes, belts and carrying a tablet.

Together they all enter the Longevity Stage and sing the tune "One more form."

杂扮十六天将，从仙楼门上寿台，分侍科。

杂扮四天官戴朝冠穿蟒束带执笏。杂扮四星官，杂扮四昭容、四宫官、金童、玉女从福台上。

杂扮千里眼、顺风耳，杂扮马、赵、温、关，杂扮十二丁甲神从禄台上。

杂扮龙王戴龙王冠穿蟒束带执笏。

净扮阙君戴冕旒穿蟒束带执笏。

全从寿台门上，唱 《又一体》。(SPBF, 1964:

48 a.- 48 b.)

Fortunately, most of the costumes mentioned have been well-preserved in the Palace Museum of the Forbidden City (Gù Gōng 故宫), the imperial palace from the Ming dynasty to the end of the Qing dynasty. Upon the recent research, I have found that these theatrical costumes are classified into four major types with several subtypes as follow:

1. Clothes (*yī lèi* 衣类): python robe (*mǎng* 蟒), official's informal robe (*kāichǎng* 开氅), informal robe with asymmetrical opening for men (*zhězi* 褶子), informal robe with symmetrical opening (*pī* 帔), palace garment

(*gōngyī* 宫衣), archer's robe (*jiànyī* 箭衣), Eight Immortals' robes (*bāxiānyī* 八仙衣), Taoist nun's robe (*dàogūyī* 道姑衣), eunuch's robe (*tàijiànyī* 太监衣), robes worn by Fortune God, Prosperity God and Longevity God (*fú lù shòu xiānyī* 福禄寿仙衣), religious ceremonial dress (*fǎyī* 法衣), garment of wealth and nobility (*fùguìyī* 富贵衣), warrior's robe (*yīngxióngyī* 英雄衣), low-ranking soldier's robe (*zúyī* 卒衣), prisoner's red jacket (*zuìyī* 罪衣), prisoner's red trousers (*zuìkù* 罪裤), cape worn when traveling (*dǒupéng* 斗篷), skirt (*qún* 裙), monk's cape (*jiāshā* 袈裟), monk's robe (*sēngyī* 僧衣) etc.

2. Armor (*kào lèi* 靠类): male military armor (*nánkào* 男靠), female military armor (*nǚkào* 女靠), Prince Ba's armor (*Bàwángkào* 霸王靠), Monkey's armor (*hóukào* 猴靠), soft armor (*ruǎnkào* 软靠), grand armor

(*dàkǎi* 大铠), Door God's armor (*ménshénkǎi* 门神铠), Ox God's armor (*niúxíngkǎi* 牛形铠), Horse God's armor (*mǎxíngkǎi* 马形铠) etc.

3. Headgear (*kuīmào lèi* 盔帽类): Imperial crown (*wángmào* 王帽), military officer's helmet (*fūzikuī* 夫子盔), military officer's lion-shaped helmet (*shīzikuī* 狮子盔), civil officer's cap (*zhōngshākuī* 忠纱盔), official cap of black crepe silk (*xiāngdiāo* 相貂), female military officer's helmet (*ézi* 额子), flossy duck-tailed headgear (*yāwěijīn* 鸭尾巾), military hero's headgear (*wǔshēngjīn* 武生巾) etc.

4. Footwear (*xuēxié lèi* 靴鞋类): high-soled boots (*gāofāngxuē* 高方靴), court boots with black plain satin (*cháofāngxuē* 朝方靴), fabric shoes (*duǎnyāoxié* 短腰鞋) etc. (Zhang, 2008: 5-6).

They were exquisitely done with brilliant colors, gorgeous adornment, marvelous embroidery, unique designs, and excellent craftsmanship. Therefore, in this study I have selected several types of costume pieces that can clearly represent the whole notion of the gala performances in the three-tiered stages during the Qianlong reign. In the world of Qing court drama, the theatrical costumes convey a visual language. It becomes a set of practices by which structural units, including silhouette, image, embroidery, color, movement, fabric texture and pattern, on the costumes can be used to communicate certain concepts of the Qing court theater. These structural units weave together the real world and the world of theater during the Qing era. Thus my paper will focus on the visual language of the theatrical costumes employed in the three-tiered stages during the

Qianlong reign. Some distinguishing features of these costumes will be analyzed in this first part. In the second part, I will examine the ways in which these theatrical attires “communicated” with the court audiences during the gala performances, which reflected the overall context of the court theater during the Qianlong era.

Distinguishing Features of Costumes Employed in the Three-Tiered Stage

Li Dou 李斗, one of the renowned chronicler of the 18-century China, recorded in the 5th volume of his memoir entitled “Record of Painted Barge in Hangzhou” (*Hángzhōu Huàfǎng Lù* 杭州画舫录), saying:

Drama in which performance deals with characters like immortals, Buddhas, kylins, and phoenixes that battle for the peaceful times is called “Grand Play.”

演仙佛麟凤太平击壤之剧，谓之大戏。

What Li Dou focused here is an array of distinctive characters that help shape the grand plays. The characterization in the grand play is the first distinguishing feature that differs from other court plays. As recorded in Li Dou's memoir, these Grand Plays are filled with a bevy of new characters, particularly those dealing with religious figures or possessing supernatural power. I have classified different types of new characters in each play as shown in the following tables.

Table 1: Characterization in the *QSK*

HEAVEN: Guanyin Bodhisattva, Rulai, Sakyamuni, Jade Emperor of the Heaven, Luohan, ten Yama Kings, Great Emperor of Northern Hades, Nazha, Iron Fan Princess, Golden lad and Jade maiden, Shancai and Dragon maiden, 28 Constellation Gods, Earthly God, Kitchen God, City God, Goddess of Western Heaven, Thunder Goddess, Lightening God, Rain God, Wind Goddess, heavenly maidens and heavenly lads

EARTH: all ghosts in ten netherworlds, animal spirits that obstructed Mulian during his journey to rescue his mother, and post-mortem souls of all wicked characters

Table 2: Characterization in the *SPBF*:

HEAVEN: Guanyin Bodhisattva, Rulai, Sakyamuni, Jade Emperor of the Heaven, Luohan, ten Yama Kings, Great Emperor of Northern Hades, Nazha, Iron Fan Princess, Golden lad and Jade maiden, Shancai and Dragon maiden, 28 Constellation Gods, Earthly God, Kitchen God, City God, Goddess of Western Heaven, Thunder Goddess, Lightening God, Rain God, Wind Goddess, heavenly maidens and heavenly lads

EARTH: all demons both in the underworld and on the earth that attached Tang Xuan Zang and his entourage

Table 3: Characterization in the *ZYXT*:

HEAVEN: Guanyin Bodhisattva, Rulai, Sakyamuni, Jade Emperor of the Heaven, Luohan, ten Yama Kings, Great Emperor of Northern Hades, Nazha, Iron Fan Princess, Golden lad and Jade maiden, Shancai and Dragon maiden, 28 Constellation Gods, Earthly God, Kitchen God, City God, Goddess of Western Heaven, Thunder Goddess, Lightening God, Rain God, Wind Goddess, heavenly maidens and heavenly lads

EARTH: 108 demons suppressed in the monastery and post-mortem souls of all wicked characters

Table 4: Characterization in the *ZDXS*:

HEAVEN: Guanyin Bodhisattva, Rulai, Sakyamuni, Jade Emperor of the Heaven, Luohan, ten Yama Kings, Goddess of the Black Mountain, Supreme God of Nine Suns, Great Emperor of Purple Star, Northern God of Three Heavenly Bureaus, Great Emperor of Northern Hades, Nazha, Golden Lad and Jade Maiden, Shancai and Dragon Maiden, 28 Constellation Gods, Mountain and River Gods, Earthly God, City God, Thunder Goddess, Lightening God, Rain God, Wind Goddess, heavenly maidens and heavenly lads

EARTH: post-mortem souls of all corrupt officials, demons and animal spirits that Yan Dongbin summoned to fight with Song army, such as Crab Spirit (*Xiejing* 蟹精), Prawn Spirit (*Xiajing* 蝦精), Turtle

Spirit (*Guijing* 龜精), Shell Spirit (*Luojing* 螺精), Loach Spirit (*Qiujiang* 鰍精), Black Fish Spirit (*Heiyujing* 黑魚精), and Golden Fish Spirit (*Jinyujing* 金魚精)

Table 5: Characterization in the *DZCQ*:

HEAVEN: Sakyamuni, Jade Emperor of the Heaven, ten Yama Kings
EARTH: ghost armies and demons in nefarious realms

Consequently, the inclusion of these new characters helps create new types of costumes employed in the gala performances on the three-tiered stages.

A memoir by Pak Chi-won or Chinese name Pǔ Zhǐyuán 朴趾源 (1737-1805), a Korean envoy who was sent to China on an occasion of the Qianlong emperor's seventieth birthday during the forty-fifth year of the Qianlong reign (1780). This Korean envoy witnessed the gala performance on the three-tiered stage named the Clear Sound Pavilion (清音閣 *Qīngyīn Gé*) in the Jehol Palace (*Rèhé* 熱河) and later recorded his experience of

visitation in the thirteen fascicle entitled “Collection of Swallow Grotto” (*Yàn Yán Jí* 燕岩集) compiled in his memoir entitled “Diary of the Jehol Palace” (*Rèhé Rìjì* 热河日记). He narrated:

... In every play that was prepared, without doubt, actors who presented performances were several hundreds in number. They were all costumed in silk and brocade. They changed their costumes based on the play. And they were all clothed in gowns and caps of Han Chinese officials. When it approached the performance time, brocade curtains would be set up around the stage. It was quiet without any human's noise. There was only the echo of boots. Not for long the curtain was removed. Then in the middle of the theater, mountains peaked up, oceans submerged, pine

trees arose, and the sun soared up. The so-called "Eulogy Song of Nine Similitudes" was like this. The yu note in all songs was with doubled clearness. And its musical tunes were all lofty and shining. It was as though it emerged from the Heaven. There was no mixture between clear and turbid sounds. All were sounds produced from flutes, bells, chimes, lutes and zithers, but only without the sound of drum. These were coordinated with layers of lamps. Thereupon, the mountains moved and the oceans revolved. Not a single thing was non-uniform, not a single matter turned upside down. Ever since the Yellow Emperor, Yao, and Shun, all of the clothes and caps are comparable to this. The subject of the play was performed accordingly.

……其设戏之时，氍施锦步障子戏台阁上，寂无人声，只有靴响。少焉掇帐，则已阁中山峙海涵，松矫日翥，所谓《九如歌颂》者，既是也，歌声皆羽调倍清，而乐律皆高亮，如出天上，无清浊相济之音，皆笙簾笛锤磬琴瑟之声，而独无鼓响，间以迭鐙，顷刻之间山移海转，无一物参差，无一事颠倒，自黄帝尧舜莫不像其衣冠，随题演之。(Chen, 2001: 118-119; Liao, 1997: 42; Pak, 1996: 237).

There are several points that can be raised from Pak Chi-won's account. But one aspect emphasized is Pak's admiration to various kinds of gorgeous costumes in silk and brocade worn by actors. This created such a spectacular scene. The fact that Pak recorded the details of

theatrical costumes clearly reflected how prosperous the Great Qing appeared during the time.

Theatrical costumes used in the gala performances on the three-tiered stages can be categorized into five main types. First is military robe (*róngfú* 戎服) of martial characters (*wǔjiàng* 武将). Since the plot of the adapted grand plays deals with battles between Han Chinese VS. Manchu, human VS. supernatural elements, gods VS. demons, therefore the employment of new costumes was unavoidable. This military robe can be classified into two subtypes: one worn when engaging in war and the other garbed when being in an informal situation (absent from war.) The former is designed in a form of armor (Figs. 7, 8, and 12), while the latter in a python robe (Figs. 2-5).

As for barbarian generals or martial characters of minority tribes (*fānjiāng* 番将), they usually wear war

armor (*dǎzhàngjiǎ* 打仗甲) or armor like those of Han Chinese. However, in order to distinguish between minority and Chinese soldiers, the helmet (*kuīmào* 盔帽) was designed differently. What the former usually wears is animal-shaped helmets, such as lion-shaped helmet and elephant-shaped helmet with fox tail (*húwěi* 狐尾) or pheasant tail (*zhìwěi* 雉尾) accessorized on top. For instance, characters like Sai Han 赛罕 and barbarian generals in the *FSTB* or Hui tribe (*Huíhuí* 回回) in the *DZCQ*. According to Song Junhua (2003: 150), the employment of these accessories to symbolize minority tribes and to differentiate them from Han Chinese derives from practice of northern-style *zaju* 杂剧 during the Ming dynasty. What Qing grand plays had adopted from Ming was developed to another level. For these grand plays

create new types of martial characters like *jiājiāng* 家将 and *ménjiàng* 门将 which, of course, bring new armor costumes into life. These minor characters sometimes engage in battles, but most of the time are responsible for guarding and monitoring certain areas. Thus, their armor style evidently differs from that of main martial characters. What they usually wear is not full armor, but merely a soft armor called *kǎijiǎ* 铠甲 or *jiànxiùguà* 箭袖褂, and such headdresses as war helmet (*dǎzhànguī* 打仗盔), military helmet (*zúkuī* 卒盔) and General turban (*jiāngjīn* 将巾).

Even supernatural characters whose roles deal with military affairs are also costumed in armor like human characters. These dehumanized gods, goddesses, immortals and demons, when engaging in war or appearing in formal situations, have to wear armors. However, what distinguish them from human characters

are some accessories decorated on their helmets. For instance, four immortal Generals like Mǎ 马, Zhào 赵, Wēn 温 and Liú 刘 in the *DZCQ*. Characters like Wúlóng 吴龙, Yuánhóng 袁洪 and Wúhào 吴昊 in the *FSTB* wear helmets adorned with centipedes (*wúgōng* 蜈蚣), monkey (*yuán* 猿) and snake (*shé* 蛇) motifs. Though this decorative style already existed in the Ming theatrical world, the Qing grand plays adopted and developed it with exquisite craftsmanship. According to Song Junhua, there are 21 and 26 military robes listed in the *DZCQ* and the *FSTB* respectively.

The second type of costumes employed in the grand plays is worn by civil characters (*wénguān* 文官). In general, this kind of costume can be classified into several subtypes, such as ceremonial robe (*jìfú* 祭服), court robe

(*cháofú* 朝服), official robe (*gōngfú* 公服) and casual robe (*biànfú* 便服). However, last two subtypes are normally employed in the grand plays. According to Song Junhua, there are 32 and 18 civil robes listed in the *DZCQ* and the *FSTB* respectively.

Like civil officials' robes during the Qing dynasty, civil characters in the grand plays wear different official robes in accordance with their ranks. For example, those with high rank usually wear python robe tied with jade belt, and helmets like golden leopard (*jīnbào* 金豹), black leopard (*hēibào* 黑豹), turban (*fútóu* 幞头), nine-layered hat (*jiǔliángguàn* 九梁冠) and gauze hat (*shāmào* 纱帽). For instance, in *QSK* characters like chief minister Lu Qi 卢杞 and Yuan Xiu 源休 wear turbans, and characters like ministers Feng Shengshi 冯盛世 and Cao Xianzhong 曹猷

忠 wear gauze hats. Those with middle rank generally wear round-collar (*yuánlǐng* 圆领) robe tied with gold belt and gauze helmet, whereas low-rank civil characters are costumed in round-collar robe tied with silver belt and gauze hat or scholar hat (*shūlìmào* 书吏帽), official hat (*guānyuánmào* 官员帽).

Casual robe (*biànfú* 便服) is another kind of special costumes worn by civil characters in the grand plays. It is a casual attire worn when a civil character rests in his residence. Sometimes a cloak (*chǎngfú* 氅服) is also worn with turban or hat as an indicator of this official identity. For instance, characters like King Zhou 纣王, Bi Gan 比干, Fei Zhong 费仲 in *FSTB*, when relaxing at home, wear cloaks with different kinds of headdresses like nine-layered hat, purplish gold hat (*zǐjīnguàn* 紫金冠) and

gauze turban. Some wear cloaks layered with official robes on top. For example, when Li Xilie 李希烈 in *QSK* and Ji Chang 姬昌 in *FSTB* are bedridden, they wear cloaks, turbans (*yāoqún* 腰裙) and wrap their heads with floral-printed kerchief. The employment of skirt in the grand plays is generally applied with low-class characters, such as farmer, laborer and beggar. However, the inclusion of skirt in these two cases probably implies weak spirit and energy of those who fall sick, thus wearing loose clothes similar to low-rank characters. This application of skirt is also another exclusive case demonstrating sick characters in the grand plays.

Chief eunuch (*huànguān* 宦官) and newly-appointed scholar (*zhuàngyuán* 状元) are other sub-categories of civil officials. Functioning as eyes and ears of the emperor, the chief eunuch character always holds a

high rank in the plays. Thus, costume designed for this character is similar to what high-rank civil character would wear. For instance, chief eunuch in *QSK* wear round-collar official robe tied with silk sash and eunuch hat (*tàijiàn mào* 太监帽). As for the newly-appointed scholar character, when he travels, he wears a red robe with a floral hairpin exclusively adorned on his hair symbolizing prosperity and blessing. For example, when scholars like Chen Zhaochang 陈肇昌, Zhu Zigui 朱紫贵, Cao Wenzhao 曹文兆 and Yi Rumei 颐汝梅 in *QSK* roam around, they wear red robes with gold belts and gauze hats decorated with golden hairpins.

As mentioned earlier, supernatural characters can be divided into two main types: martial and civil ones. Like martial characters, supernatural characters of civil type also wear the same costumes as human ones.

However, it is more complicating for the former. This is because most religious figures fall into this category. As a result, they must wear costumes with designs exclusively representing their identities and roles. For instance, religious characters like Sakyamuni and Rulai wear python robes, monk robes (*xífóyī* 袈裟) or drape with *Kāṣāyas* (*jiāshā* 袈裟). In this case, monk robes and *Kāṣāyas* signify their identities as Buddhist figures, whereas python robes symbolizing their high ranks. I would argue that the fact that these religious figures are dehumanized by wearing python robes in the grand plays reflects how Qing emperors attempted to simplify and humanize religions during that time.

However, what distinguishes such supernatural characters from human ones is headdress. God-like and religious characters wear jade-pendant crown (*miǎnliú* 冕

旒), whereas human lord or emperor characters wear king's hat (*wángmào* 王帽). For example, in *QSK* Ya judge (*Yǎ pànguān* 哑判官) wears a turban; Earthly God wears a red gauze hat, and 太白金星 wears red golden leopard headdress. More exceptional cases include variegated styles of hats and turbans exclusively designed for specific god-like characters, such as Guanyin hat (*Guānyīn kēnǎo* 观音磕脑) for Guanyin Bodhisattva and eight-immortal turban (*Bāxiān fútóu* 八仙幞头) for Eight Immortals.

The third type of characters included in the grand plays is an ordinary people character. Costume can be divided into three sub-types: the noble, religious figures like Buddhist monks and Daoist priests, as well as prisoners. In *QSK*, 52 costume pieces of these sub-types are recorded. These characters wear different costumes

when engaging in different situations. For instance, Fu Xiang 傅相, one of the noble characters in *QSK* normally wears Daoist priest robe tied with sash and official hat. But when he celebrates his birthday, he wears round-collar official robe tied with a gold belt and gauze hat. When he relaxes at his residence, he wears a cloak and a turban. But when he goes outside, he is costumed in a travelling outfit (*xíngyī* 行衣) with a turban.

Prisoner's costume is also interesting and unique. Four kinds of such costume are listed in *QSK*. First type consists of a regular robe tied with apron and hairnet (*fàwǎng* 发网). Second type includes a magpie robe (*xǐquèyī* 喜鹊衣) tied with apron and hairnet. Third type comprises a magpie robe tied with apron and disheveled hair (*sànfà* 散发). Fourth type is composed of tattered clothes (*pòbǔyī* 破补衣) tied with bloated skirt (*dābāo* 搭

包) and hairnet. For example, Dong Zhibai 董知白 originally is a low-rank official who wears Daoist robe. Later when he is mistakenly convicted of murder, a hairnet and an apron are added to his costume. Tian Xilan 田希蓝 and Yao Lingyan 姚令言 originally are court officials dressed in official robes and gauze turbans. But when they are convicted of murder, their costumes change to magpie robes, aprons, hairnet or disheveled hair. Chen Rongzu 陈荣祖 originally is a poor scholar who wears tattered clothes and a turban. After he is convicted of murder, a bloated skirt and a hairnet are added to his costume.

The fourth type of characters whose costume is specially designed for gala performances in the three-tiered stages is ghostlike or specter character. 78 sets of ghostly costume are included in *QSK*. There are two ways of costuming specter characters: draping and not

draping ghostlike cloth (*dā hún pà* 搭魂帕). The former is applied when human and specter characters act together on the stage. In order to differentiate these characters, a piece of cloth is wrapped around an actor's body. However, when any specter character is clearly identified on the stage, the ghostlike cloth is not required. Song Junhua (2003: 157) has categorized the ghostlike cloth into three sub-types: the cloth draped by a prenatal character, a pre-mortem character and a prisoner character.⁹

Besides variegated types of theatrical costumes, in the grand play scripts also record a bevy of common and exquisite, exotic fabric types. What I can extract from the scripts include regular fabric (*bù* 布) palm fiber (*zōng* 棕) eagle plume (*yīng líng* 鹰翎) gold (*jīn* 金) felt (*zhān* 毡)

⁹ Song Junhua has made an observation that the practice of draping ghostlike cloth might derive from ancient funeral in which corpse's face was always covered by a piece of fabric.

gauze (*sī* 丝) *tun* silk (*túnjuàn* 屯绢) tiger's skin (*hǔpí* 虎皮) jade (*yù* 玉) fine satin (*duàn* 缎) satin (*líng* 綾) silk (*chóu* 绸) gold-thread weaving silk (*kèsī* 缂丝) floss-like silk (*sīróng* 丝绒) and brocade (*jǐn* 锦). These different types of costume fabrics identify hierarchical level of characters in the plays. For instance, felt hat is normally designed and worn by commoner characters, such as villagers, farmers, carpenters, cart drivers, inn servants and merchants. Eagle plume hat is specially designed for barbarian soldiers, messengers, and hunters. Palm fiber hat is for those characters whose duties deal with the underworld, such as netherworld guards, netherworld soldiers, and imprisoned ghosts. High-rank characters wear python robes or monk robes made from gold-thread weaving silk.

How the Theatrical Attires “Communicated” with the Court Audiences

In China a system of assigning clothes to distinguish members of the court was formalized into sumptuary laws as early as the Zhou period. Since then clothing differentiations had distinguished status, rank, and position in society through the assignment of embroidered symbols, significant colors, and specific garments. Traditional Chinese theater then evolved this clothing precept and absorbed a design language that emphasized clothing for the identity of characters.

There are three types of messages that theatrical costumes in the Qing court theater can convey and communicate to the spectators. First these theatrical attires can identify role types onstage. Like characters in traditional Beijing Opera, those performed in the Qing

court can also be divided into four major role types: standard male (*shēng* 生), female (*dàn* 旦), painted face or formidable male (*jìng* 净), and clown (*chǒu* 丑). Each major role type is also divided into different subtypes as follow:

Standard male: *lǎoshēng* 老生 – a dignified aged man, *xiǎoshēng* 小生 – a youth, *wáwáshēng* 娃娃生 – a child, *wénshēng* 文生 – a civil man, *wǔshēng* 武生 – a martial man

Female: *lǎodàn* 老旦 – a dignified old woman, *qīngyī* 青衣 – a virtuous, decorous woman, *huādàn* 花旦 – a coquettish woman, *dāomǎdàn* 刀马旦 – a martial woman, *chǒudàn* 丑旦 – a comedienne

Painted face: *zhèngjìng* 正净 – primary painted face or *dàhuāliǎn* 大花脸 – big painted face or *hēitóu* 黑

头—“black face”, *fùjìng* 副净 – supporting painted face,
wǔjìng 武净 martial painted face

Clown: *wénchǒu* 文丑 – a clown, *wǔchǒu* 武丑 – a
 comedian of the military type (Luan 1994: 113-118; Zung
 1980: 37-38)

Within the conventionalized nature of the Qing court theater, just as each role's subsets have recognizable identities. Thus each has a distinctive visual image, from choice of the headdress and makeup, through their dress, to their shoes. The rules for the attire of each role type and the styles of clothing have become relatively fixed. To achieve these standardized identities, the costumes for each role type are selected from a specific range of clothes, and all characters within that role type are dressed from this same assortment of garments. Within the garments used for a given role type, the choice of clothes further

reflects the role subtype, defining age, position, or disposition. Then the garments also indicate the nature of the individual character, the characteristics of that individual's personality, and the given circumstances. The determination of the wardrobe becomes more refined with each progression of character delineation. Therefore, members of a role subtype will wear the same general style of costume, and a named character within a role subtype could wear virtually identical garments in productions of the same play as shown in Table 6.

Table 6: The Identification of Kunqu and Jingju Costumes and Its Relation to Role Types¹⁰

¹⁰ Due to prohibition from taking pictures by the Imperial Palace Museum, all figures shown in this paper are taken from Zhāng Shūxiàn 张淑贤 eds. *Gù Gōng Bówùyuàn Cáng Wénwù Zhēnpǐn Quánjí: Qīng Gōng Xìqǔ Wénwù* 故宫博物院藏文物珍品全集: 清宫戏曲文物 [Complete Collection of Precious Objects Preserved in the Palace Museum: Theatrical Objects in the Qing Court]. Hongkong 香港: Shāngwù yìnshū guǎn 商务印书馆, 2008.

Main Roles	Sub-roles	Costume Types
<i>shēng</i>	<i>lǎoshēng</i>	python robe (Fig. 2), long informal robe with symmetrical opening (Fig. 3), official's informal robe (Fig. 4), high-soled boots (Fig. 5)
	<i>wénxiǎoshēng</i>	informal robe with asymmetrical opening in pastel colors, embroidered with flowers (Fig. 6)
	<i>wǔxiǎoshēng</i>	male military armor (Fig. 7) with helmet and high-soled boots
<i>dàn</i>	<i>lǎodàn</i>	female military armor (Fig. 8), female formal robe with symmetrical opening (Fig. 9), skirt (Fig. 10)
	<i>qīngyī</i>	female informal robe with symmetrical opening, skirt
	<i>huādàn</i>	female informal robe with symmetrical opening, skirt
	<i>dāomǎdàn</i>	female military armor, skirt
<i>chǒu</i>	<i>wénchǒu</i>	palace dress (Fig. 11)
	<i>wǔchǒu</i>	armor's robe (Fig. 12), male military armor
<i>jìng</i>	<i>zhèngjìng</i>	python robe, long informal robe with symmetrical opening
	<i>fújìng</i>	informal robe with asymmetrical opening
	<i>wǔjìng</i>	armor's robe (Fig. 12), male military armor

Apart from identifying the role types, the costumes also convey information about the specific identities of the characters. Alexandra B. Bonds (2008: 34-38) has classified this aspect into six pairs: “male/female,

youth/age, upper/lower status, rich/poor, military/civilian, and Han/minority”. By looking at costumes worn by actors onstage, the audience could identify the sex and age of characters, for they are clearly projected through their costumes. While the garment vocabulary for male and female roles overlaps, the costumes clearly indicate the sex of the role by form and decoration, among other characteristics. Besides gender, age is projected through Chinese theatrical costumes by three components: form, color, and surface ornamentation. Furthermore, theatrical costumes can establish the social hierarchy of the characters. In private scenes, a higher-status man dresses in the *pī* or an embroidered *zhězi*. A lower-status male will likely wear a plain *zhězi*, as do servant and children. The thickness of the sole of the shoe also contributes to the hierarchy of the costume. Higher-ranking roles also wear

more elaborate headdresses, with gold filigree, pearls, festive pompoms and long pheasant feathers (*lǐngzǐ* 领子) (Bond, 2008: 55-57).

The third message that Chinese theatrical costumes can communicate with the spectators is characteristics of characters onstage. And this was executed by symbolism of fabric colors. The vibrant colors of Chinese theatrical costumes particularly those employed in the Qing court theater do not project randomly and unrestrainedly. In fact, as Bonds (2008: 70) has argued, “a complex system of color meanings for the garments and the roles controls the stage picture. While the silhouette of the garment represents the primary indication of the role type, the color of the fabric projects information about the specific character”. The color schemes on theatrical costumes derive from Chinese precept of Five Elements (*Wǔ Xíng*

五行), in which five major colors designates each element: green, red, yellow, white and black, as shown in Table 7 (Wang, 2001: 139-140). This influential principle has been translated to traditional Chinese costumes. The regulations and symbolism behind these costumes have the additional purpose of communicating the inner life of the characters to the audience. Using a vocabulary shared in all performances, the colors express power, rank and status, location and age. In addition to establishing a character's place in society, the colors also project personal aspects of personality, including loyalty, bravery, or deception.

Table 7: The interrelationships of the Five Elements, directions, stage in human's life, color scheme and the *yin-yang* application

<u>Elements</u>	Wood	Fire	Earth	Metal/gold	Water
<u>Direction</u>	East	South	Center	West	North
<u>Stage in life</u>	Birth	Growth	Synthesis	Gathering	Hiding
<u>Color</u>	Green	Red	Yellow	White	Black
<u>Nature</u>	<i>Yin</i>	<i>Yang</i>	<i>Yang</i>	<i>Yang</i>	<i>Yin</i>

Source: Evelyn Lip, *Feng Shui: Environments of Power: A Study of Chinese Architecture*, p. 35.

The colors of traditional Chinese costumes are divided into a system of upper five (*shàng wǔ sè* 上五色) and lower five (*xià wǔ sè* 下五色) colors. The upper colors are red, green, yellow, white, and black, which correspond with the colors of the five elements. As the upper colors are the purest, and considered the finest in historical terms, they appear on garments of nobles and officials at court in their formal dress and on generals, and commonly appear more on make and leading characters. Their designation as “upper colors,” however, refers to their frequency of use onstage, rather than exclusively to status. The hues of the lower colors vary somewhat, but they can generally be listed as purple or maroon (*zǐ* 紫), pink (*fěnhóng* 粉红), blue (*lán* 蓝), lake blue (*húlán* 湖蓝), and bronze or olive green (*jiàng* 绛) (Zhang, 2008: 22; Bonds 2008, 72-73).

Through the five upper and five lower colors are the principal colors that are drawn on when constructing costumes, no colors are forbidden onstage.

In *FSTB*, python robes up to nine colors are employed. They are red python robe for Taibai Constellation God Xu Gai (Tàibáixīng Xú Gài 太白星徐盖), silver-red one for Bingling God (Bǐnglínggōng Huángyuánhuà 炳灵公黄元化), yellow one for Jinling Goddess (Jīnlíng Shèngmǔ 金陵圣母), golden yellow one for Haotian Great God (Hàotiān Dàdì 昊天大帝), greenish blue one for Heavenly God Zhao Gongming (Yuántán Shén jūn Zhào Gōngmíng 元坛神君赵公明), green one for Eastern Great God Yu Da (Dōngfāng Zhǔdòushén Yú Dá 东方主痘神余达), moon-white one for Western Great God Yu Zhao (Xīfāng Zhǔdòushén Yú Zhào 西方主痘神

余兆), white one for Western Heavenly Envoy Zhou Xin (Xīfāng Xíngwēn Shǐzhě Zhōu Xìn 西方行瘟使者周信) and black one for Northern Heavenly Envoy Yang Wenhui (Běifāng Xíngwēn Shǐzhě Yáng Wénhui 北方行瘟使者杨文辉). The costume guidebook (*Chuāndài Tígāng* 穿戴提纲) for grand plays also lists fifteen colors of python robes employed in *SPBF*: red, maroon, crimson, white, black, green, yellow, violet, pink, silver-red, moon-white, gray, blue, azure blue, and dark gold. Not only python robe, armor is also designed with various hues, much more than those for local dramas or even court theater in the Ming dynasty. Five colors of armor are listed for five main characters in *FSTB*. It is recorded that Lü Yue 吕岳, Zhou Xin 周信, Li Qi 李奇, Zhu Tianlin 朱天麟 and Yang Wenhua 杨文辉 wear yellow, green, white, red and black

robes respectively. Song Junhua (2003; 189) has argued that all costume colors denote five symbolic meanings: character type and social class, character's personality, rank, character's outstanding feature and tradition.

In addition to the aforementioned three messages, some aesthetic principles of theatrical costumes employed during the gala performances at Qing court also creates visuality that communicates with the audience. I would argue that, like Kunqu and Jingju, Qing court drama was also shaped by what Elizabeth Wichmann has termed "three aesthetic principles: synthesis, stylization, and convention" (1991: 4-5). These three concepts have been integrated in Qing court theatrical costumes, creating the visual language onstage. That is to say, the synthesis between the actors' movements and the exquisitely-designed costumes forms a significant component of the

performance style. With its roots in dance, virtually every piece of clothing has been purposefully developed to assist and emphasize movement. The water sleeves, the beards, and the headdress feathers become extensions and enhancements of the actor's body. This creates an emotional expression which is a central aspect of the actor's performance. For the stylization in costumes, Bonds (2008: 30-31) has argued that the performance moves away from reality through the absence of three elements: time, place, and season. Rather than carefully recreating the images of the distinct dynasties, the costumes are a combination of periods blended with absolute theatricality. Anachronisms occur both within and among the individual costumes. Though the costumes may appear to be imperial dress, in actuality, they are far from historical replications. The construct of time further

disintegrates with the repeated usage of costumes. All grand plays, regardless of their time period, are presented with the same selection of costumes, time occurs both simultaneously and without chronology.

As for the third aesthetic principle, convention, Wichmann (1991: 5) has analyzed that “The use of a particular convention sign serves to signal its ascribed meaning to the audience”. Thus, what Chinese theatrical costumes conventionally signal is expression of role types and characteristics of characters onstage. As Bonds (2008: 29) has argued “In the development of a shared language for the costumes, two significant aspects have emerged: the costumes have been limited to a small number of standard form that can achieve greater variety through color and ornamentation, and the costumes are designated with characteristics that visually communicate the given

circumstances of the role types, creating a repeating and recognizable image for the audience”. To accommodate the costume conventions, Qing court troupe had to develop a creative and yet standard stock of garments to cover their repertoire of grand plays.

Hence, the ultimate aim of the integration of synthesis, stylization, and convention is to create the beauty and harmony of the Qing court theater. That is to say, the costumes, headdresses, and makeup provide a visually attractive image that is enhanced by the beauty of actors’ movements onstage. The overlaying of beauty reduces the contrasts among characters, creating a distinct visual language to portray the range of personalities in society. The actor within the costume, on the other hand, has many tools within the conventionalized style to represent aspects of personality that may not be visible in

the dress. Nothing can occur, however, that might deviate from the prescribed pattern or completeness of the performance, thereby taking away from the perfection to which the presentation aspires.

Conclusion:

Speech and visual communication are parallel and usually interdependent means by which humans exchange information. In the world of Qing court theater, the librettos that actors chanted combining with their performing skills that interacted with the splendid costumes onstage create the unity and harmony of the performance. And this directly and simultaneously communicates with the audiences as shown in Diagram 1.

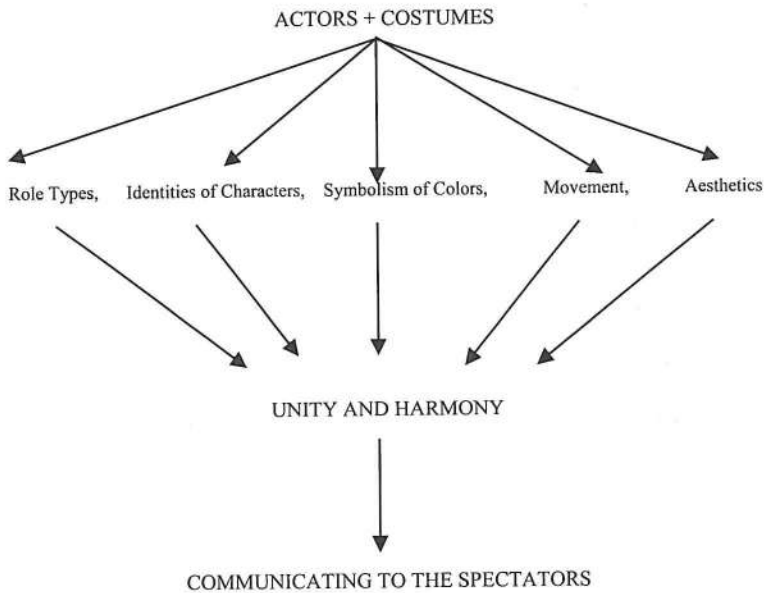


Diagram 1: The Interdependent Feature among Actors, Costumes and Spectators

In the world of Qing court theater, the actor is the central element in the performance. The actor's accomplishment in mastering the challenging performance style forms the key to audience enjoyment of the theatrical event. Because of the focus on the actor, costume becomes

the foremost visual aspect. Building on the sumptuousness of the clothing of the Chinese imperial court, the costumes employed in the gala performances in the three-tiered stages have reached a magnificence of textile expression and beauty in their own right. Due to newly-created characters, new types of theatrical costumes have been introduced and brought to life. Each costume projects an image of unmatched elegance. For they are fashioned from brilliantly colored silk fabrics and lavishly hand-embroidered with multicolored and metallic threads in exquisite floral and faunal ornamentation. When the actors attired in this brilliant dress are viewed in combination with their elaborately evocative face painting and glittering rhinestone-bejeweled and pearled headdresses, the combination creates an image of breathtaking beauty. The combinations of the costumes onstage are selected to

convey not only the individual characters, but to produce the most beautiful stage picture possible. Each garment can be created in an infinite variety of renditions, with different combinations of color and pattern, making a richly extensive vocabulary of attires. This language of clothing forms the foundation for the examination of costumes in this paper. It was the first and the only period of time in which Chinese theatrical costumes were brought to this extravaganza level. Compared to costumes in court theater during the Ming dynasty, the Qing ones were much more elaborate. In a cultural context where fine textiles and adornment have long been admired, the costume used for gala performances in the Qing court represent the grandeur of the courts, exemplifying the pinnacle of Chinese stage costume.

Appendix:



Fig. 1. Front view of the three-tiered stage Pleasant Sound Pavilion. Photo from Láng Xiùhuá, *Zhōngguó Gǔdài Diwáng Yǔ Líyuán Shìhuà*, cover page.



Fig. 2: Python robe of red satin embroidered with clouds and gold dragons, for the Rank Promotion Blessing Dance. Qianlong period. Photo from Zhāng Shūxiàn eds. *Gù Gōng Bówùyuan Cáng Wénwù Zhēnpǐn Quánjí*: *Qīng Gōng Xìqǔ Wénwù*, p. 12-13.



Fig. 3: Male informal dress of tan veiled gauze embroidered with gold lanterns, flowers and butterflies. Qianlong period. Photo from Zhāng Shūxiàn eds., *ibid.*, p. 38.

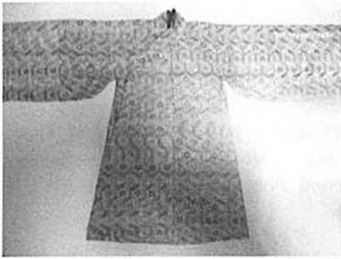


Fig. 4: Military officer's informal dress of turmeric brocade with geometric and auspicious floral patterns. Qianlong period. Photo from Zhāng Shūxiàn eds., *ibid.*, p. 87.

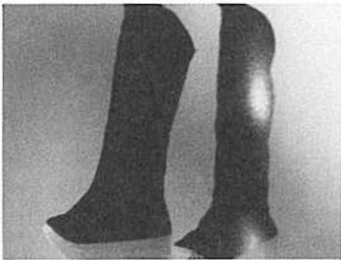


Fig. 5: High-soled boots of black plain satin. Guangxu period. Photo from Zhāng Shūxiàn eds., *ibid.*, p. 218.

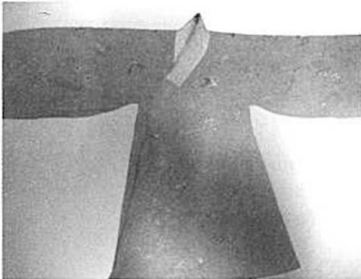


Fig. 6: Male lined garment of bluish white gauze embroidered with flowers and butterflies. Qianlong period. Photo from Zhāng Shūxiàn eds., *ibid.*, p. 51.



Fig. 7: Male military officer's armor of red satin with gold lockstitch pattern. Qianlong period. Photo from Zhāng Shūxiàn eds., *ibid.*, p. 64.



Fig. 8: Female military officer's armor of white satin embroidered with phoenix among peonies over a gold turtle-shell pattern. Guangxu period. Photo from Zhāng Shūxiàn eds., *ibid.*, p. 66.



Fig. 9: Female informal dress of buff silk embroidered with floral sprays and butterflies. Qianlong period. Photo from Zhāng Shūxiàn eds., *ibid.*, p. 46.



Fig. 10: Skirt of pink satin embroidered with training flower sprays. Qianlong period. Photo from Zhāng Shūxiàn eds., *ibid.*, p. 176.



Fig. 11: Male robe of red satin with red square patches embroidered with gold thread crane for the first grade civil official. Qianlong period. Photo from Zhāng Shūxiàn eds., *ibid.*, p. 15.



Fig. 12: Military officer's martial attire of light blue gauze with clouds and gold dragons. Qianlong period. Photo from Zhāng Shūxiàn eds., *ibid.*, p. 78.



Fig. 13: Light martial attire of white satin with colored clouds and gold dragons. Qianlong period. Photo from Zhāng Shūxiàn eds., *ibid.*, p. 99.



Fig. 14: Soldier's vest of red satin with clouds and gold dragon medallions. Qianlong period. Photo from Zhāng Shūxiàn eds., *ibid.*, p. 95.

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