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This review article gives an overview of work by Western scholars in English on Chinese classical theatre genres from the perspective of a Chinese scholar.

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With the generous support of a fellowship from the American Council of Learned Societies, in 2008 I spent ten months researching in the field of comparative theater studies at Washington University in St. Louis. After serious consideration, I focused my research on examination and commentary on the studies of classical Chinese drama in North America from 1998 to 2008, comparing them with studies made by Chinese scholars during the same period.

What is called “the classical Chinese drama” includes zaju and yuanben in Song, Jin, and Yuan; nanyi (southern theatre) in Song and Yuan; zaju (variety play) in Yuan, Ming, and Qing; chuanqi (southern theatre) in Ming and Qing; huabu (miscellaneous category) in Ming and Qing; and local theater during the late Qing and Republic of China, such as jingju (Beijing opera), jueju (yue opera), Cantonese opera, ritual theater, marionette theatre, shadow theater and so on. The research on classical Chinese drama before 1998 can be found in Sun Ge, Chen Yangu, and Li Yijin’s Guowai Zhongguo gudian xiqu yanjiu (Research on...

In order to get the basic information, I compiled a chronologically arranged bibliography of research on classical Chinese drama in North America from 1998 to 2008. The authors in the bibliography are those who lived and worked in North America when they published their works, not including those who neither worked nor lived in North America but published their works in North America. All works are written in English, with most devoted to classical Chinese drama. Comparative research that relates ancient and modern, China and the West, is included, but I have not listed research on modern Chinese drama (since 1919).

The bibliography covers work in three categories: books, dissertations and articles. The books include the translations of classical Chinese plays and academic monographs, while the articles include those published in journals, books, and essays, not including book reviews. The books list is based on the database of WorldCat, and the subject names are (1) theater—China—history, and (2) Chinese drama—history and criticism. The search scope of dissertations is based on the database of ProQuest Dissertations and Theses (PQDT), and the subject categories are (1) Asian literature, (2) theater, (3) art history, and (4) comparative literature. The article list is based on the database of Bibliography of Asian Studies (BAS), using the subject names (1) China—literature—drama, and (2) China—arts—theater. The document language is English. In addition, I supplemented these lists by extensive reference to the English books on Chinese drama and theater, the autobiographies of the scholars, and other articles that carried relevant information.

According to incomplete statistics, there were 175 works on classical Chinese drama published in North America from 1998 to 2008. Among them, there are nineteen books, twenty-three dissertations, and 133 articles. On this basis, I wrote the brief introduction to these books and the dissertation abstracts.

In my evaluations I have focused on three aspects of humanistic research: a detailed and meticulous arrangement of documents and materials, comprehensive and thorough research on history, and innovation and breakthrough in theoretical explanation. Following my comments on these works on classical Chinese drama, I briefly review these aspects, in order to evaluate the general value and trends in China studies in North America in the twenty-first century.

**Translations of Plays and Compilations of Resources**

Classical Chinese plays translated in English were multitudinous in the twentieth century, including some celebrated plays. Scholarship

Nine plays in the zajü form have been translated into English since 1998. Qian Ma (2005) translated five plays: Injustice to Dou E (Dou E yuan), a Yuan zajü by Guan Hanqing; Qiannü’s Soul Leaves Her Body (Qiannü li hun), a Yuan zajü by Zheng Guangzu; Mulan (Ci Mulan), a Ming zajü by Xu Wei; Spring Pavilion (Lin chun ge), an early Qing zajü by Wu Weiye; Laughter in a Flour Barrel (Miangan xiao), a late Qing zajü by Tang Ying. George Kao (1998) translated A Sister Courtesan Comes to the Rescue (Jiu Fengchen), and Dale R. Johnson (2003) translated Gold Thread Pond (Jinxianchi), which were Yuan zajü by Guan Hanqing. Elizabeth A. Wichmann-Walczak and Fan Xing (2003) translated Lady Zhaojun Crosses the Frontier (Zhaojun chu sai), a Ming zajü by Chen Yujiao. Shu-Chu Wei (2005–2006) translated The Image in Disguise (Qiaoying), a Qing zajü by Wu Zao.


Fan Pen Chen (1999, 2007b) translated four classical Chinese shadow scripts: The Temple of Guanyin (Guanyin si), Three Opening Blessings (San chu tou), The Eighteen Levels of Hell (Shiba ceng diyu), and The Yellow River Magic Formation (Huanghe zhen). Chen also translated seven contemporary Chinese shadow plays (2004). Even though many Chinese plays have been translated into English, complete and/or new translations of classical Chinese plays are still very limited in the English world up to this day, thus the new English translations of Chinese plays mentioned above are very welcome.

Likewise, many scholars in North America paid great attention to the compilation and recommendation of Chinese drama resources during the twentieth century. The case in point is Wilt Idema and Stephen H. West’s (1982) pioneering Chinese Theater 1100–1450: A Source Book, which translates historical resources relating to the theatrical performance from the Northern Song to the early Ming and contributes to the study of classical Chinese drama. The fine tradition of creating resource works has been brought to a great height of development since 1998. The following three unprecedented monographs published recently are inventive and valuable.

Dale R. Johnson’s Glossary of Words and Phrases in the Oral Per-
forming and Dramatic Literatures of the Jin, Yuan, and Ming (2000) covers the oral performing and dramatic literatures of China written over the four-hundred-year period from A.D. 1200 to 1600. It contains approximately eight thousand entries based on the reading notes and glosses found in various dictionaries, thesauruses, glossaries, and editions of works during that period. As late as 1981, no comprehensive dictionary or glossary for this literature existed in any language, Asian or Western. With this aid even a relative novice having a reasonable command of Chinese can read, translate, and appreciate this great body of literature with an ease undreamed of even two decades ago.

Faye C. Fei’s Chinese Theories of Theater and Performance (1999) arranges chronologically more than sixty selections to provide a historical overview of four major periods: antiquity to the Song dynasty (fourth century B.C.E.–1279 C.E.), the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368) and Ming dynasty (1368–1644), the Qing dynasty (1644–1911), and the rest of the twentieth century. Through the writings of noted Chinese philosophers, scholars, artists, and critics from the time of Confucius to the present, this rich compendium provides a fascinating guided tour of China’s evolving conceptions of theater and performance.

Tan Ye’s Historical Dictionary of Chinese Theater (2008) provides basic information on classical Chinese theater from the remotest antiquity to the present, but it does not include the modern forms. Since this is the first English-language dictionary dedicated to the Chinese theater, the author’s task was not only to get the information and translate it but also to establish a practical categorical system.

Moreover, some scholars, such as Alvin P. Cohen (2000), Patricia Sieber (2000), and Andrea S. Goldman (2008), introduce several rare resources on Chinese drama. These resources are little known in the English world, but are very valuable.

**Expanding Content and Describing History**

As an art genre, classical Chinese drama is a synthesis of literary and performing arts and historical artifact. Studies of classical Chinese drama in North America since 1998 have greatly expanded the range of research to include the study of Chinese drama history.

**INTERPRETATION OF PLAYWRIGHTS AND PLAYS**

In North America some Chinese playwrights and plays researched before have been given new interpretations since 1998, while more and more Chinese playwrights and plays have drawn scholarly interest.

Some scholars research Chinese playwrights and plays, such as Wilt L. Idema, who studied Xu Wei’s *Nüzhuyuan* (Top Female Grad-

By focusing on Chinese theater groups, Tian Yuan Tan’s dissertation (2006) explores the production, transmission, and reception of songs and drama in literati communities in sixteenth-century North China, particularly two successive “qu [song] communities” in Shaanxi and Shandong, respectively. That is a literary world which remains largely unknown to us.

Two phenomena concerning research on classical Chinese playwrights and plays since 1998 are especially worthy of notice.

First, research on Chinese society, culture, thought, literature, and art from the late Ming to the early Qing has become a hot subject in Chinese studies in North America, and this includes research on classical Chinese drama. Scholars in North America have paid close attention to the dramatists who lived during the late Ming and the early Qing, such as Meng Chengshun, Ding Yaokang, Wu Weiye, and You Tong. Just as Wilt L. Idema said, “No genre of literature provided a better opportunity to express the conflicting emotions concerning the collapse of the Ming and the subsequent conquest of the Chinese world by the Manchu Qing than drama. . . . Its shorter length allowed for a quicker reaction to events, and views, allowing the playwright to air all the attractive options he might eventually reject. Drama also may have appealed to contemporary writers because the obvious fictionality of its characters gave authors the freedom to pursue clarity of expression in the dialogues” (Idema 2006b: 377).

Second, scholars in North America have made great effort to investigate the inherited and varied relations between dramatic texts from different periods or between drama texts and other literary texts. Some of them, such as Andrea Sue Goldman, show more interest in the condition of historical development made up by different drama texts. In the third part of her dissertation, Goldman (2005) analyzes the contents of one thematic grouping of scripts in light of their performance contexts. Some investigate the artistic traditions constituted by drama and other literary texts. Wilt L. Idema (2003) compares Tang Xianzu’s *Mudan ting* with its source from the angle of the author’s writing. Jing Shen (2000) does close readings of six chuanqi plays and analyzes the intertextual interactions of these chuanqi plays with the genres of fiction and poetry as well as with other chuanqi plays. Referring to specific plays and works of fiction, Chun Mei (2005) and Ling
Hon Lam (2006) explores deeply the mutual relations between drama and fiction.

**Descriptions of Theater Performance**

One very positive trend in research on classical Chinese drama is the study of theater performance. Since 1998, such subjects as script and performance, actors and roles, stages and directors, performance and audience, and theater and society have been described in many books and articles.


On the subject of actor and role, Sophie Volpp’s essays (2002, 2003) investigate the living condition of actors in seventeenth-century China with the theory of the sociology of drama. Joshua S. Goldstein’s monograph (2007) describes the formation of Beijing opera in the late Qing and its subsequent rise and re-creation as the epitome of the Chinese national culture in Republican-era China. Providing a fascinating look into the lives of the opera’s key actors like Mei Lanfang and the “Four Great Female Impersonators,” Goldstein explores their methods of earning a living, their status in an ever-changing society, the ways in which theaters operated, the nature and content of performances, the makeup and the interests of the audiences, and the larger relationship between Beijing opera and Chinese nationalism.

On the subject of stages and directors, Min Tian (2005–2006) examines a great deal of historical materials to describe in vivid detail the role of stage directions in the performance of Yuan drama. Anne Megan Evans (2003, 2007) provides a baseline understanding of contemporary *xiqu* directors’ circumstances and compares traditional *xiqu* performance with the performances in the contemporary urban setting of Beijing to conclude that it is historical, political, social, and economic forces that boost the development of *xiqu* director’s role.

Other scholars examine the performance of Chinese theater
from sociological perspectives. Tian Yuan Tan (2004) studies the prohibition of *jiatou zafu* (variety opera of emperors) in the Ming dynasty and the portrayal of the emperor on stage. Fan Pen Chen’s essay (2003–2004) focuses on the forbidden fruits offered in dramatic performances that fed the rationale for regulating not only performing traditions but also performers’ contacts with officials and productive members of society.

**Examinations of Theatrical Artifacts**

In North America, research on Chinese theatrical relics has laid special emphasis on block prints and frescoes concerning drama and theater, and some scholars have studied the relation between publishing culture and drama illustration with great interest since 1998.

Li-ling Hsiao (2002, 2007) explores how illustration, painting, theater, literature, and philosophy interrelated and intersected in the context of drama publication, which was considered as a distinct literary genre. She argues the past was literally reborn within the present on the stage, a mystical space. By using the theatrical conventions of stage arrangement, acting gesture, and frontal address, drama illustration recreated the mystical character of the stage within the pages of the book and thus set the conflation of past and present on a broader footing. And Julia K. Murray (2005) and Catherine Pagani (2007) also wrote the essays to examine cultural meaning of illustrations in printed books during the Ming and Qing dynasties.

Two dissertations finished recently try to examine theatrical block prints or theatrical frescoes, so as to grasp clearly the essence of aesthetic and cultural psychology in imperial China. Meng-ching Ma’s dissertation (2006) studies *The Story of the Western Wing* (*Xixiang ji*), the most popular dramatic publication in the late Ming, and explores two specific modes of visualization of text through publication: fragmentation of the text and framing of the text. Though derived from different origins, Ma believes these two illustration modes show the common tendency to favor visuality over narrativity in the late Ming. Jeehee Hong (2008) seeks to reveal the meanings and functions of images that represent theatrical performances formulated within mortuary contexts in mid imperial China. Such images of theatrical performance included brick reliefs, clay figurines, and engraving on the surfaces of sarcophagi and paintings, increasingly occupying tomb space from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries. Focusing on the relationship between the representations and theatrical experiences of the contemporary living, Hong argues that the theatrical vision, by staging worlds for both the living and the dead, served for the contemporaries to configure themselves as audience members of the symbolic performance of death and
life, as well as to socialize death as an enactment of their various and varied lives.

**Research Problems and Theoretical Approaches**

Classical Chinese drama scholars in North America have carried on research from ever new perspectives since 1998. Consequently their theoretical and interpretive approaches have been both innovative and inspiring.

**Questions of Gender**

Research on gender questions in classical Chinese drama has developed very successfully in North America since 1998.

Trying to analyze the gender problem in dramatic texts such as *The Story of the Western Wing*, Stephen H. West and Wilt L. Idema (1991 [1995]) have gone ahead of the rest with their several recent new works (such as Idema 1999).


Zuyan Zhou’s monograph (2003), a revision of a 1996 doctoral dissertation, offers an original and astute look at the concept of androgyny in drama classics such as *Mudan ting* and *Taohua shan* (Peach Blossom Fan). Zhou concludes that androgyny in late Ming and early Qing literature was essentially the dissident literati’s stance against tyrannical politics, a psychological strategy to relieve anxiety over their growing political inferiority. Male scholars and writers, reacting to their marginal status in political and social institutions, developed an intensified awareness of their yin standing and a shared gender identity with women. They created a legion of male and female characters who defied gender imperatives in their quest for whole identities, thus the phenomenon of androgyny proliferated.

Erotic Chinese ghosts are almost exclusively female, and the significance of this gender asymmetry in Chinese literary history is the subject of Judith T. Zeitlin’s monograph (2007). Ranging widely across disciplines, Zeitlin integrates detailed analyzes of great literary works with insights drawn from the history of medicine, art history, comparative literature, anthropology, religion, and performance studies. She
points out the theater's ability to "undo" death and resurrect the past by staging the reunion between body and soul.

Some scholars research the gender problem from the point of view of stage performance. Min Tian (2000) discusses cross-dressing in traditional Chinese theatre. Other books on cross-dressing in Chinese drama are Siu Leung Li (2003) and Weichen Liao (2004). Faye C. Fei (2005) compares the changing roles of Chinese women on stage and offstage to reveal some characteristics of traditional Chinese culture. Weikun Cheng (2003) observes the living conditions of actresses in early twentieth-century Beijing. Tracing the emergence and transformation of women's Yue opera in Shanghai in the 1930s and 1940s, Jin Jiang's dissertation (1998, cf. Jin Jiang 2009) demonstrates that women's entrance into the opera market, both as consumers and producers, was central to the transformation of the male-dominated opera culture of the Qing dynasty to a female-centered one in the twentieth century. Women's opera was the single most important case of women's entrance into the urban entertainment market.

**Communication Phenomena**

Contemporary communications studies came into being in the United States in the 1930s and grew into an important discipline of the social sciences in the 1960s (Rogers 1994). Since 1998, paying attention to the whole communication process of producing, adapting, publishing, circulating, and receiving of dramatic works has become a main trend in research on classical Chinese drama in North America.

The elder generation has made great efforts in this area. Stephen H. West (1998, 2003) collected a great deal of materials to discuss the adaptations of northern drama by Zang Maoxun, a Ming editor, and reveal the ideology within dramatic text. West (2005–2006) compared Jin Shengtan, Mao Qiling, Commentary and Sex and the Caizi Mudan ting Notes to The Story of the Western Wing and pointed out that what we saw as excesses were really only expansions of earlier texts, a writing outside of the lines in the latest stratum of a deep tradition of palimpsests. Wilt L. Idema (2004, 2005a, 2005b, 2005–2006) also published essays one after another in which he discusses how Ming editors and publishers revised Yuan dramatic works and how Yuan dramatic texts circulated during the Ming.

Younger scholars have garnered outstanding achievements as well. Yuming He (2003) investigates the performance texts of classical Chinese drama from the aspect of the production. Her dissertation discusses the ways in which private performance space shaped the writing and printing of performance texts, particularly a new publishing genre in the late Ming that is called drama miscellanies (xiqu zashu). The dis-
sertation as a whole explores the specific term “private performance space,” by which the meanings of text become spatially and performatively significant.

In reference to the circulation and reception of classical Chinese drama, Catherine Swatek and Patricia A. Sieber each wrote an important monograph. Swatek (2001) devotes her attention to the performance circulation of Chinese drama. Her book explores responses to Tang Xianzu’s classical play *Peony Pavilion* in relation to its public-literati playwrights, professional performers of *kun* opera, and directors and audiences outside China. Sieber (2003) stresses the circulation of Chinese dramatic texts and argues that, particularly between 1550 and 1680, Chinese elite editors rewrote and printed Yuan *zaju* and *sangü* (song) to imagine and embody new concepts of authorship, readership, and desire. Blending a flair for textual nuance with theoretical engagement, Sieber analyzes the critical and material facets of the tradition of Yuan *zaju* and *sangü* across different historical periods and cultural settings, and presents a compelling case study of literary canon formation.

Moreover, several scholars have examined the circulation of classical Chinese drama either from the perspective of literary criticism, such as Sally K. Church (1999) and Liangyan Ge (2003), or from the perspective of printing and publishing, such as Katherine Carlitz (2005) and Lucille Chia (2005).

**Popular Culture and Religious Culture**

By using the theories and methods of religious studies, anthropology, and folklore, scholarship on classical Chinese drama in North America has produced more excellent studies since 1998.

Karin E. Myhre (1998) brings the study of religions and folklore to dramatic texts. In her dissertation, a typology of dramatic narratives involving ghosts and a detailed analysis of the characteristics of ghosts in Yuan dramatic texts are presented along with individual discussions of eleven plays from the Yuan corpus. Myhre argues that in Yuan dramas the verbal and visual instability usually associated with ghosts surfaces in the interaction between players and audience. While aspects of this pattern are similar in some ways to exorcistic rituals, these northern dramas also function like didactic histories. Moreover, Eugene Y. Wang (2003) clearly narrates the appearance and evolvement of the romantic legend about White Snake in Leifeng Pagoda of Hangzhou, and analyzes the religious figures and popular psychology within it.

Qitao Guo (2005) contributes to the studies of the popular theatrical performance with insights from religious studies, anthropology,
and folklore. His monograph analyzes Confucian ideology as culture and culture as history by exploring the interplay between popular ritual performance of the opera Mulian and gentrified mercantile lineages in late imperial Huizhou. Guo shows how local elites appropriated the performance of Mulian, turning it into a powerful medium for conveying orthodox values and religious precepts and for negotiating local social and gender issues altered by the rising money economy.

Other recent studies are Fan Pen Chen’s “Ritual Roots of the Theatrical Prohibitions of Late-Imperial China” (2007a) and Tuen Wai Mary Yeung’s “To Entertain and Renew: Operas, Puppet Plays and Ritual in South China” (2008). With special attention devoted to the religious dimensions of Cantonese opera in Hong Kong and marionette theatre in western Fujian, Yeung’s dissertation discusses the inseparable relationship between traditional opera and religion in China from the ancient periods up to the present. His study is concerned both with the ritual functions of operas and plays in the communities where they are performed, and with the beliefs and taboos of the performers themselves.

APPLICATION OF CULTURAL THEORY

Debates over cultural theories have raged tempestuously since the middle of the twentieth century, particularly in the humanities. This is also visible in the study of classical Chinese theater. Several North American scholars have utilized cultural theory to shed new light on the complicated relationships between the drama and social culture.

One remarkable example is Tina Lu’s dissertation (1998) and monograph (2001) which concerns two plays central to the Chinese canon, Tang Xianzu’s Mudan ting and Kong Shangren’s Taohua shan. Lu approaches the question of personal identity in the two plays from a variety of disciplinary perspectives, not only literary criticism but also, among others, philosophy, jurisprudence, and art history. She argues that the notion of personhood is the fundamental topic of comparison, since the comparative enterprise depends upon some understanding of how each tradition approaches the notion of personal identity.

Using the theory of cultural transformation, Joshua Goldstein’s dissertation (1999) describes the consolidation and transformation of Beijing opera into a symbol of Chinese national culture during the late Qing and the Republic. Goldstein argues that during that period Beijing opera became the most popular and economically developed form of urban stage entertainment in China, and its actors, playwrights, and patrons were central figures in the popular imagination and cultural politics of the day. In the process, Beijing opera was in many ways on
the leading edge of modern transformations and experimentations in serving as a symbol for a traditional culture that many sensed was receding under the pressures of modernization. Tong Xu’s (2006) dissertation focuses on the relations between theater and different social groups, especially the literati, in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century China. Xu demonstrates that the changing ways in which theater was “consumed” embodied profound social and cultural transformations in these two centuries, and the theater’s shift from elite salon to public playhouses indicated its change from an object of luxury consumption to one of mass consumption.


**Comparative Drama Studies**

The latest scholarship on comparative drama in North America provides a variety of interesting subjects. How does classical Chinese drama emerge and spread on the American stage? What cultural function does it have for Asian peoples when Chinese plays are performed in the United States? How do American audiences enjoy the spectacle of Chinese theater? How does an American director adapt a Chinese play? These questions are considerable culture issues from the global perspective.

Daphne Pi-Wei Lei (2003, 2006a) has investigated the circulation of Chinese theater in California from the nineteenth century to the present in several articles. Lei’s monograph (2006b) focuses on the notion of “performing Chinese” in traditional opera in the “contact zones,” where two or more cultures, ethnicities, and/or ideologies meet and clash. It is an interdisciplinary work that seeks to create discourse among theater and performance studies, Asian and Asian American studies, and transnational and diasporic studies.

As one of the Chinese drama classics, Tang Xianzu’s *Peony Pavilion*, won the attention of circles of the theater performance and drama research in the United States. In 1998, Peter Sellars’s avant-garde production of *Peony Pavilion* was first shown at the Barbican Centre in London. Then in 1999 Chen Shi-Zheng’s *Peony Pavilion* was first shown at

Comparative studies of Shakespeare and the Chinese drama have been perennially popular. New discussions in this area have appeared since 1998 as well (Huang 2004). Min Tian (1998) reviewed the reinvention of Shakespeare in traditional Asian theatrical forms in 1998. In his dissertation (2001) and monograph (2008), Tian carries out a case study of “mutual displacement” as exemplified in some Shakespearean adaptations in Chinese traditional theatrical forms, demonstrating how both Shakespeare and the Chinese drama are displaced in such intercultural adaptations.

Wen-shan Shih’s (2000) dissertation singles out two distinctive traditions—Beijing opera and Shakespearean drama—and examines their confrontation and reception, and then compares Shakespearean plays *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* with their Beijing opera adaptations, *The Kingdom of Desire* and *The Prince’s Revenge*. Shih aims to examine how to achieve the equilibrium between borrowing Western playwriting and staging techniques, which gives social significance to modern audience, and preserving Asian forms and aesthetics, which provides cultural roots and a sense of continuity with the past.

**Conclusions**

As mentioned above, research on classical Chinese drama in North America since 1998 has gained brilliant achievements in the compilation of documents and materials, in studies of theater history, and in theory and interpretation. Looking across this sweep of scholarship, one might make the following observations.

First, English sources of classical Chinese drama have been continually increasing since 1998. Scholars in North America have translated and introduced a large number of the documents that relate to classical Chinese playwrights’ lives and activities, dramatic works and critics, theatrical performances and artifacts. They tried to compile Chinese drama materials meticulously and in detail, expand the history of Chinese drama comprehensively and thoroughly, and explain Chinese drama theoretically and creatively. Their efforts have opened up a much broader field and built up a much more solid foundation for the future development of the research on classical Chinese drama in the English world.
Second, in the research on classical Chinese drama since 1998, most of the scholars in North America have persisted in the spirit of empirical study and abided by the study principle of seeking truth from facts. Outstanding scholars who have carried out empirical studies include Cyril Birch, Dale R. Johnson, Katherine N. Carlitz, Stephen H. West, Wilt L. Idema, Elizabeth A. Wichmann-Walczak, Fan Pen Chen, Kimberly Besio, David Rolston, Wai-ye Li, Catherine Swatek, Judith T. Zeitlin, Min Tian, Faye C. Fei, Qitao Guo, Patricia Sieber, Tina Lu, Sophie Volpp, Daphne Pi-Wei Lei, Tan Ye, and others. Moreover, through doctoral dissertation research, younger scholars are continually developing the spirit of empirical study. Some of them, as mentioned above, are Joshua Goldstein, Jing Shen, Andrea S. Goldman, Dietrich Tschanz, Yuming He, Tian Yuan Tan, Meng-Ching Ma, and Jeehee Hong. Their dissertations present research on academic issues meticulously and conscientiously.

Third, since 1998, scholars in North America have studied classical Chinese drama from multidisciplinary perspectives and have provided a great deal of valuable research in terms of their global perspectives and comparative points of view. They have succeeded in bringing research on classical Chinese drama to the forefront of academic research. They have paid great attention to elite drama as well as popular theater, stressing the mutual influences between them. They expressed a persistent interest in the dramatic texts, materials, and artifacts as well as in theatrical performance, stages, and audiences, particularly concerning the relations between literary forms and the performance forms of Chinese drama. They tried not only to reveal what the dramatic documents, literature, and art are, but also to search for the relationships between drama and society, culture, religion, philosophy, and other arts (as music, painting, calligraphy, sculpture).

Fourth, Chinese studies in North America always regard the academic tradition of rational speculation as of great importance. Therefore, most of the scholars since 1998 have studied classical Chinese drama from innovative theoretical perspectives. Some of their more theoretical works are extremely valuable for their clear-cut arguments, thorough elaborations, and careful considerations. Even when studying the history of classical Chinese drama, these scholars have pondered the importance of the cultural context or the social significance behind the historical phenomena and the evolutionary process, or explore the cultural conflicts and constructions in the historical progress. Comparing Chinese scholars and North American scholars, both propose and/or explain the subjects of discussion, each using their special methods. Their achievements in research on classical Chinese drama constitute a kind of complementary relationship and they advance this field of academic study together.
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