

# Exploration of the Formation Path of Yuan Dynasty Zaju Music and Script System

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## Abstract

As the first peak in the development of Chinese drama, Yuan Dynasty Zaju was influenced by various factors in its formation. The external structure of Yuan Dynasty Zaju includes the music system and the script system, both of which exhibit different inheritances of “existing forms.” The music system was selected based on musical forms such as daqu, changzhuan, and various palace tunes, while the script system evolved through continuous practical exploration based on the trial-and-error experiences of drama performance. In pursuit of artistic continuity, this study explores the formation path of Yuan Dynasty Zaju, tracing its origins and connecting the artistic forms that preceded and followed the development of drama.

**Keywords:** Yuan Dynasty Zaju, various palace tunes, *History of Song and Yuan Dramas*

## 1. Introduction

In “The Origins of Yuan Dynasty Zaju” from *History of Song and Yuan Dramas*, Wang Guowei discusses the origins of Yuan Dynasty Zaju from both a “form” and “material” perspective, proposing the viewpoint that “it can be known that the construction of Yuan dramas largely draws from existing forms” (Wang Guowei, 2020). The emergence, development, continuity, and interplay of art are all the results of various factors working together. As an early form of Chinese theatrical art, Yuan Dynasty Zaju profoundly influenced the development of subsequent theatrical art forms. By exploring the formation process of Yuan Dynasty Zaju and organically connecting different artistic forms before and after its formation, we seek to identify the diverse influences on the construction of Yuan Dynasty Zaju, breaking through the limitations of artistic formation and development, and connecting the breadth and continuity of theatrical art.

## 2. Evolution of the Music System

Yuan Dynasty Zaju employed a total of three hundred and thirty-five musical “forms,” among which eleven can be traced back to the daqu (large tune), and twenty-eight originated from various palace tunes (zhugong diao). In the Song Dynasty, there was the practice of zhuantao (turning and stepping), but zhuantao could only repeat the same tune, which was not conducive to storytelling. While daqu increased in number, it was limited to the repetition of the same tune before and after, making it convenient for narration but rigid in its movements, fixed in its words, and strictly structured. Performing a complete story with daqu was extremely challenging. Chanzhuan (sung in turn) consisted of multiple tunes, while various palace tunes were based on a composite structure. However, the frequent changes in palace tunes made them unstable, and this structural flaw resulted in some shortcomings in the “bold and vigorous” aspects of the music. Yuan Dynasty Zaju, building upon the foundation of Song Dynasty music, gradually integrated, developed, and selected elements, ultimately forming a musical style that was more liberated than daqu and more bold and vigorous than various palace tunes.

### 2.1 Development of Daqu

Daqu, a complex form of music, evolved with the goal of expanding its musical capacity while facilitating

storytelling. Firstly, the musical principles of daqu, characterized by cyclic patterns and variations, provided a foundation for its development. The three-part structure of daqu exhibited cyclic changes in rhythm, form, and themes. Furthermore, within each segment, there were evident rhythmic variations. For example, in the daqu of “Cailian Ling,” the final segment “Ru Po” is followed by “Gun Bian,” “Shi Cui,” “Gun,” “Xie Pai,” and “Sha Gun,” each with distinct rhythmic patterns (Wang Guowei, 2018). Additionally, daqu was not exclusively associated with a single palace tune. According to Mr. Wang Guowei’s research, there were 103 daqu used in official scripts, implying that multiple palace tunes could share the same daqu, such as “Zhong Lü Diao, Nan Lü Diao, and Xian Lü Diao, all featuring the ‘Green Waist’ daqu” (Wang Guowei, 2020). Similarly, “Zheng Gong Diao, Dao Diao Gong, Xian Lü Gong, Huang Zhong Gong, all feature the ‘Da Liang’ daqu” (Wang Guowei, 2020). There were also cases where a single palace tune corresponded to a specific daqu, as seen in “Da Shi Diao featuring the ‘Da Ming Yue’ daqu” (Wang Guowei, 2020). With 103 different daqu in official scripts, and considering the dual-segment structure of Zheng Zaju performances, the choice of palace tune varied for different productions. For instance, “Bi Ji Man Zhi” mentions, “Today, there are seven palace tunes found in the world, but we do not know which palace tune was presented by the Western Liang.” (Wang Zhuo, 2020) This indirectly suggests that the switching of palace tunes during performances was common.

Secondly, due to its extended length, daqu could employ “zhaibian” (extracting sections) to facilitate flexible transitions. Shen Kuo’s “Mengxi Bitan” notes, “What is known as ‘dabian’ (big sections) includes sequences like ‘xu (order),’ ‘yin (lead-in),’ ‘ge (singing),’ ‘xiwa (joyful melody),’ ‘si (lively),’ ‘shao (whistle),’ ‘cui (press),’ ‘dian (plucking),’ ‘gun (bold),’ ‘po (breaking),’ ‘xing (movement),’ and ‘zhongqiang (middle tune),’ as well as ‘tage (singing and stepping).” There are dozens of these sequences, and each one can have multiple layers. These are selected and used, referred to as ‘zhaibian.’ In today’s daqu, they are all cut and used, not true ‘dabian’ (Shen Kuo, 2019). This passage highlights the complexity of the daqu structure and the practical use of “zhaibian.” “Zhaibian” takes various forms, allowing for the extraction and combination of sections from different parts of the daqu to create new pieces, adapting to new variations. This could involve selecting a segment from a particular part of the daqu’s structure or extracting a section from the three-part format to create multipart daqu compositions.

Despite its complexity and strict structure, daqu possesses inherent variability. The cyclic and variation elements in daqu expand its musical capacity, making it flexible in carrying narratives. Additionally, the use of techniques like “zhaibian” enhances daqu’s ability to convey narrative functions.

## 2.2 Exploration of Chanzhuan and the Establishment of Suite Songs

The exploration of chanzhuan took place against the backdrop of a cultural desire for narrative art during its time, focusing on the musical system’s exploration of connecting diverse songs. Chanzhuan is a musical art form that combines multiple individual songs into a cohesive whole, comprising two types: “chanling” (entangled command) and “chanda” (entangled response). In “Ducheng Jisheng,” it is noted, “The introduction and concluding section are called chanling; after the introduction, using two phrases to cyclically alternate is called chanda” (Guanyuan Nai Deweng, 1957). The song structure in “Yuanshe Shiyu” follows a sequence: “Yuanliuyan” → “Zisuwan” → “Lü Lūjin” → “Haohai’er” → “Daifu Niang” → “Haohai’er” → “Chanzhuan” → “Yuenenhao” → “Gudatu” → “Guziyu” → “Weisheng,” known as the “chanling” form. In *Song-Yuan Xiqu Shi*, it is mentioned, “From a structural perspective, this type seems like Northern melodies, but judging by the names of the songs, it appears to be Southern melodies” (Wang Guowei, 2020). Mr. Wang Guowei’s research reveals that “Lü Lūjin,” “Haohai’er,” and “Yuenenhao” belong to the Southern melodies of Lü Gong, while “Zisuwan” belongs to the Southern melodies of Xian Lü Gong, indicating a connection between the song titles in chanzhuan and those of Southern dramas.

So, what is the relationship between chanzhuan and Northern melody suites? *Song-Yuan Xiqu Shi* also states, “Using the same palace tune for a song, it somewhat resembles Northern melody suites” (Wang Guowei, 2020). Combining this with Xu Zhiheng’s discussion that “a suite is composed by stringing together songs with the same palace tune” (Xu Zhiheng, 2015), a suite refers to a musical composition that links songs with the same palace tune. Both the Yuan and Ming editions of Yuan Dynasty Zaju scripts feature “chanling” and “chanda” forms in “chuanzuan,” such as the third suite in the Yuan edition of “Haojiu Zhao Yuan Yu Shanghuang,” which is a “chanda” form: “Fendie’er” → “Zuichunfeng” → “Yingxianke” → “Shangxiaolou” → “Me” → “Shier Yue” → “Yaominge” → “Shua’hai’er” → “Ersha” → “Wei” (Ning Xiyuan, 1988). The second suite of “Guandawang Dandao Hui” in the Yuan edition is a typical “chanda” form: “Duanzhenghao” → “Gunxiuqiu” → “Tangxiuca” → “Gunxiuqiu” → “Tangxiuca” → “Gunxiuqiu” → “Tangxiuca” → “Gunxiuqiu” → “Daodao ling” → “Wei” (Ning Xiyuan, 1988). From this, it can be seen that there is a clear connection between the chanzhuan system and the music system of Yuan Dynasty Zaju. The presence of “introduction” and “concluding section” in chanzhuan corresponds to the musical structure of “introduction–interlude–conclusion” found in Yuan Dynasty Zaju, as documented in Yan Nanzhi’an’s “Chang Lun” when it mentions, “There is a ‘concluding section’ known

as ‘suite’” (Yannanzhi’an, 2020). Although “Chang Lun” does not provide a comprehensive categorization of the musical structure, its records indirectly confirm the relationship between chanzhuan, suite songs, and Northern melodies.

While chanzhuan had a single-song structure, it was insufficient for creating suites. The appearance of “fu’zuan” (covered chanzhuan) integrated individual songs. “Ducheng Jisheng” notes, “Now, there is also ‘fu’zuan,’ which can express the emotions of flowers under the moonlight and the charge of cavalry, among others. Chanzhuan is the most challenging, as it encompasses slow songs, broken songs, daqu, lively singing, command songs, fan songs, and calling sounds of various styles” (Guanyuan Nai Deweng, 1957). Fu’zuan allowed suites to be repeated and enabled storytelling. The two chanzhuan song forms, “chanling” and “chanda,” are themselves suites, and “fu’zuan” serves as the connection between these suites. This revolutionary and contemporary song form laid a stable foundation for the music system of Yuan Dynasty Zaju. It is essential to note that the development from large interconnected daqu to chanzhuan, from there to connected suite songs (fu’zuan), and finally to the formation of the music system of Yuan Dynasty Zaju was a process driven by the pursuit of broader musical capacity and grander narrative effects, influenced by multiple factors, in response to the changing demands of the era.

### 2.3 The Comprehensive Development of Various Palace Tunes

Various palace tunes involve a form of art that combines singing and spoken dialogue, accompanied by specific melodies to narrate longer stories. When examining the musical systems of Song Dynasty music, various palace tunes share the most similarities with Yuan Dynasty Zaju. However, within various palace tunes, there exist various suites, and the shared musical system with Yuan Dynasty Zaju is just one aspect of it. Fundamentally, various palace tunes and Yuan Dynasty Zaju are two distinct forms of art. By examining three surviving editions of various palace tunes from different time periods, one can clearly observe the internal development of various palace tunes and the positive impact of this development and accumulated artistic experience on the formation and development of Yuan Dynasty Zaju. This examination will focus on changes in the number of suites, the size of these suites, and the annotations related to chanling forms within the suites in these three editions.

Firstly, “Liu Zhiyuan’s Various Palace Tunes” is a printed edition from the Jin Dynasty. Most of its suites follow the structure of “palace tune introduction → conclusion,” with limited capacity in each suite. For example, [Huangzhong Gong · Kuaihuonian] → [Conclusion] (Ling Jingxian & Xie Boyang, 1988). In the surviving edition, there are only three instances explicitly marked with the “chanling” form: [Zhengguan · Yingtian Changchanling] → [Gancaozi] → [Conclusion]; [Zhong Lü Diao · Angongzi Chanling] → [Liuqingniang] → [Suzao’er] → [Liuqingniang] → [Conclusion]; [Xian Lü Diao · Lianxiangqin Chanling] → [Zhenghuaguan] → [Xiuquner] → [Conclusion]. In “Chang Lun” by Yan Nanzhi’an, it is mentioned, “When a ‘work’ becomes a ‘yuefu,’ and there is a ‘concluding section,’ it is called a ‘suite,’ and small songs called ‘yeler’ are popular” (Yannanzhi’an, 2020). Although “Chang Lun” is not comprehensive, it summarizes the characteristic of suites having a concluding section. Thus, it can be understood that suites consist of multiple songs with a concluding section. The structure of *Liu Zhiyuan’s Various Palace Tunes* is relatively simple, with very few suites, and only three instances marked with “chanling.”

Secondly, *Various Palace Tunes of The West Chamber* contains multiple structures. Within *Various Palace Tunes of The West Chamber*, there are suites following the structure of “palace tune introduction → conclusion,” such as [Xian Lü Diao · Shanghuashi] → [Conclusion]. There are also multiple-palace-tune suites, such as [Xian Lü Diao · Zuiluòpò] → [Huangzhong Gong · Shixiangjintong] → [Conclusion], which make up the majority of the suites. Additionally, there are suite songs with multiple melodies within a single palace tune, such as [Zhengguan · Liangzhou Juduansong] → [Yingtian Chang] → [Chanzhuan] → [Gancaozi] → [Tuobushan] → [Santai] → [Conclusion], which includes chanzhuan songs. *Various Palace Tunes of The West Chamber* marks “chanling” in twenty-eight instances, such as [Xian Lü Diao · Zuiluòpò Chanling] → [Zhengjin Guan] → [Fengchuiheye] → [Conclusion], and marks “chan” in five instances, like [Xian Lü Diao · Dianjiangchun Chan] → [Fengchuiheye] → [Zuixipu] → [Conclusion]. There are suite structures without “chanling,” such as [Huangzhong Gong · Huangying’er] → [Xian Lü Diao · Liumeshicui] → [Liumebian] → [Haha Ling] → [Duanlian’er] → [Haha Ling] → [Duanlian’er] → [Conclusion], which are multiple-palace-tune suites but include chanling-style chanzhuan songs. From the above summary, it is evident that Dong Jieyuan’s *Various Palace Tunes of The West Chamber* has a significantly larger number of suite songs compared to *Liu Zhiyuan’s Various Palace Tunes*. The suite structures have also become longer, as seen in songs like [Huangzhong Gong · Kaihua Zhuomuer the First], which contains fourteen interludes. Additionally, the annotations for “chanling” have reduced and exhibit a pattern of “chanling” → “chan” → “omission.”

Finally, *Various Palace Tunes of the Tianbao Era* was compiled by Wang Bocheng, and in *The Record of Ghosts*, Zhong Sicheng categorized Wang Bocheng as one of the “distinguished predecessors who have passed away” (Zhong Sicheng, 2020). Furthermore, there are extant miscellaneous plays from *The Tale of Li Taibai’s*

*Banishment to Yelang* in Yuan printed editions. Examining the temporal development and comparing *Various Palace Tunes of the Tianbao Era* with the previous two collections horizontally, we can observe that the suite songs gradually matured. There is an increase in the number of suite songs, and their capacity has grown larger. For instance, the song [Yue Diao · Tazhenma] has seventeen interludes. When we conduct a vertical comparison between *Various Palace Tunes of the Tianbao Era* and *The Tale of Li Taibai's Banishment to Yelang*, we find that multiple-palace-tune structures dominate *Various Palace Tunes of the Tianbao Era*. However, the proportion of suite songs in multiple-palace-tune structures is still relatively small. Thus, it can be observed that the overall structure of *Various Palace Tunes* tends to become fragmented.

Analyzing the three different editions from various periods, we can see that the musical structure of *Various Palace Tunes* bears a striking resemblance to that of Yuan miscellaneous plays. The exploration of these two forms, text and performance, has accumulated rich experience in shaping the musical structure of Yuan miscellaneous plays. However, it is important to note that *Various Palace Tunes* and Yuan miscellaneous plays are fundamentally different art forms. Even in terms of their strikingly similar musical structures, they have entirely different compositional logics. The fundamental structure of *Various Palace Tunes* should involve multiple palace tunes with unlinked melodies. In contrast, Yuan miscellaneous plays, during their exploration, eventually adopted the structure of one palace tune with multiple melodies, which later served as the basis for constructing four-suite structures in the form of interconnected suite songs.

In conclusion, the influence between art forms always results from the interaction of various factors within a specific historical context. Yuan miscellaneous plays, as an emerging art form, were inevitably influenced by various existing art forms. The logical chain leading to the formation of the musical structure of Yuan miscellaneous plays is now clear. To expand the capacity for narrative purposes, large compositions such as “Da Qu” underwent transformations, adopting forms like “Zhai Bian” and “Bian Yao.” This eventually led from the repetition of the same melody to the connection of different melodies in “Chang Zhuan.” However, “Chang Zhuan” as a single suite could not support a sufficiently long narrative. The single musical structures within *Various Palace Tunes* were relatively short and heavily reliant on the cumulative variations of multiple palace tunes. This resulted in fragmented storytelling and a scattered structure and tonality. As *Various Palace Tunes* transitioned from primarily single palace tunes to predominantly multiple palace tunes, the narrative content expanded, and the expressive forms became more flexible. However, the frequent changes in palace tunes also caused disruptions in the narrative rhythm. This flexible and dynamic musical structure couldn't support the epic narrative with a consistent tonality. *Various Palace Tunes* increased narrative length through the accumulation of palace tunes, but Yuan miscellaneous plays chose to increase the capacity of suites while reducing their number to enhance narrative content and structural stability. This analysis makes it clear how Yuan miscellaneous plays made their artistic choices. The inclusiveness and extensibility of suites allowed them to encompass sufficient narrative content, and the “Fu Zhuan” style, applied between different suites, enabled Yuan miscellaneous plays to narrate complete and grand stories within four to six suites. Therefore, the suite-based structure of one palace tune with multiple melodies, which evolved from *Various Palace Tunes*, became the primary musical structure of Yuan miscellaneous plays. When “Fu Zhuan” interconnected suites with melody sequences as the basic structure, it formed the musical structure of Yuan miscellaneous plays.

### 3. Evolution of Script Narrative Structure

In terms of the internal composition of Yuan miscellaneous drama, the need to accommodate larger narrative demands was a significant driving force behind the continuous innovation and development of its musical structure. The exploration of musical structures provided a stable platform for storytelling, but how to use this platform to achieve narrative purposes required early Yuan playwrights to explore narrative structures. In the process of exploration, various aspects of art subtly and progressively interacted with and influenced each other, mutually driving artistic development. Before the establishment of a fixed script structure, early Yuan playwrights explored various art forms from the Song, Jin, and Yuan periods, especially Song zaju (variety drama). Song zaju primarily performed Zheng zaju, where the choice between Zheng zaju, Yan duan (seductive interludes), and San duan (scattered segments) depended on the performance venue. According to records, Zheng zaju featured two different stories in its performance. This paved the way for the exploration of the script structure in early Yuan miscellaneous drama. From the perspective of the logical evolution of art, the narrative structure of zaju evolved from performing two distinct stories separately to integrating them into a single performance. It involved attempting to find connections between these two narratives and ultimately merging them. At the script level, this progression went from one script for two stories to using “wedges” to connect the narratives, and finally, the establishment of the “one script with four suites” structure.

Firstly, the exploration of “Jianwu” did not directly influence the formation of the Yuan miscellaneous drama system but rather provided a path for the exploration during the process of the formation, development, and evolution of Yuan miscellaneous drama. The exploration path of the script's narrative system and structure began

with “Jianwu,” which sought to find connecting points between two narrative segments. This path continued as early Yuan playwrights attempted to use “wedges” to link two stories and explored the limitations of zaju’s narrative capacity simultaneously. Ultimately, it led to the establishment of the logical progression path of the “one script with four suites” script system. “Jianwu” used the theme of “swords” as a thread to attempt to find connecting points between two different stories. “Jianwu” performed two distinct stories and deliberately merged them into a single performance. Wang Guowei commented on “Jianwu” in his work *Tang and Song Daju Examination*, stating, “The large qu (daju) and zaju gradually converge here, as can be seen in this case, where two stories are performed within a single qu.” “Jianwu” was constrained by the musical structure, but it still attempted to integrate the two stories in terms of performance. The large qu structure, while complete, was not sufficient to perform grand and free-flowing narratives. It could only be paired with extremely simple plots, aligning with the earlier discussion on the evolution of the musical structure. Various factors collectively limited the narrative capabilities of the large qu, but “Jianwu” intentionally sought commonalities in performance to connect the two segments and create a more profound narrative space.

Secondly, in the early stages of Yuan miscellaneous drama formation, playwrights embarked on explorations from this perspective as well. First, from the perspective of narrative content, this manifested as a transition from connecting two separate stories to constructing a complete narrative. The play *Zhang Zifang’s Yi Bridge Visit to Lülü* exists in two versions, one in *Maixianguan Chaoxiao Ancient and Modern Zaju* and the other in *Guben Yuanming Zaju*. According to Zhong Sicheng’s *Lugui Bu*, the author is identified as Li Wenwei. The structure of the *Yi Bridge Visit to Lülü* script includes the beginning section, the second section, the interlude, the third section, and the fourth section. Structurally, the interlude appears between the second and third sections. In terms of content, the beginning section and the second section provide a coherent narrative of Zhang Liang visiting Huang Shigong and receiving three volumes of heavenly books from him. The interlude depicts Li Changzhe’s actions following Zhang Liang. The third and fourth sections depict Zhang Liang as a military strategist, using tactics to capture Shen Yang and Lu Jia, while Han Xin hosts a victory banquet. However, while the third section is rich in content, the fourth section consists of only three songs at the end. The *Guben Yuanming Zaju* edition of the script comments, “The situations before and after the fourth section are not very connected,” and further states, “It appears to be a play assembled by patching together miscellaneous elements” (Wang Jilie, 1957). Overall, the interlude in the script is intended to echo Zhang Liang’s opening lines in the third section, creating a sense of cohesion. However, the wide narrative span between the third and fourth sections, despite the presence of an interlude, does not create a seamless and coherent narrative story. Whether this was the intention of the author or a later addition, the sense of patchwork is evident. In terms of narrative content, “Zhang Zifang’s *Yi Bridge Visit to Lülü*” exhibits similarities to the two-part stories in Song zaju, and it represents a transitional phase in the evolution towards a more complete narrative due to the maturity of the musical structure. Second, from the perspective of script structure exploration, it reveals an exploration of segmenting the script. The script structure of Gao Wenxiu’s *Baoheng Gong’s Journey to the Meeting at Mianchi* in *Maixianguan Chaoxiao Ancient and Modern Zaju* consists of an interlude, the beginning section, the second section, the third section, an interlude, and the fourth section. Gao Wenxiu’s *Liu Xuande’s Solo Visit to Xiangyang* script follows a structure of the beginning section, the second section, an interlude, the third section, an interlude, and the fourth section. Both *Baoheng Gong’s Journey* and *Liu Xuande’s Solo Visit* adopt a narrative model featuring two stories, with an interlude between the second and third sections to connect the two stories. The presence of an interlude allows the narrative to follow a linear chronological logic, but structurally, the scripts still feature four sections and two interludes as a transitional form. Additionally, during the early Yuan period, there were scripts such as Guan Hanqing’s *Madam Liu’s Celebration Banquet with the Five Marquises* with a structure of interlude, the first section, the second section, the third section, the fourth section, and the fifth section, as well as Bai Pu’s *Dong Xiuying’s Story of Flowers and the Moon by the Eastern Wall* with a structure of interlude, the first section, the second section, the third section, the fourth section, and the fifth section. From the extant Yuan miscellaneous dramas, it is evident that in the early stages of Yuan miscellaneous drama formation, the initial focus was on meeting narrative requirements, followed by efforts to standardize script structures. These early Yuan dramas, featuring multiple sections and interludes, represent a transitional phase from exploration to standardization.

The development of the Yuan miscellaneous drama system from exploration to perfection benefited from the feedback within the creative ecosystem of Yuan miscellaneous drama. The refinement of the Yuan miscellaneous drama system was closely linked to stage practices. Due to the close relationship between playwrights and the stage, where playwrights often played roles as actors, the interaction between playwrights and performers created a vast creative ecosystem. This close-knit ecosystem significantly shortened the feedback and modification processes during the initial exploration of Yuan miscellaneous drama, accelerating the formation of the stable “four acts and one interlude” system.

The origin of the script system can be traced back to “existing forms,” but it has an inheritance relationship different from the clear evolutionary relationship seen in the music system. Existing arts, limited by their own

constraints, could not provide direct exploratory experiences for Yuan miscellaneous drama. Therefore, the relationship between the development of the script system in Yuan miscellaneous drama and existing arts may not appear as closely intertwined. However, the modes of artistic practice offered by existing arts served as the foundation for the exploration of the script system in Yuan miscellaneous drama. The basic structure of performance in Song zaju, the combination of various techniques, including large-scale music and dance, and the art of storytelling, all accumulated as practical experiences. These various existing art forms established an aesthetic standard that influenced the development and refinement of Yuan miscellaneous drama. During the exploratory phase, Yuan miscellaneous drama utilized the practical stage experience for trial and error, feedback, and adjustments. It gradually approached the established aesthetic standards, ultimately leading to the formation of a stable structural framework. The creation of art is driven by multiple factors, and art is always subject to change, even as it establishes a stable artistic system that continues to evolve.

#### 4. Conclusion

Yuan miscellaneous drama exhibits two different selection relationships concerning “existing forms.” Starting from the perspective of the music system, the process of artistic evolution, driven by the capacity of music itself and the requirements of music to convey narratives, involves various musical forms mutually promoting and drawing from the strengths of various traditions. This journey from expanding capacity to breaking narrative conventions, from connecting different tunes to the formation of multi-tune suite structures, ultimately led to the establishment of the music system in Yuan miscellaneous drama, demonstrating a more apparent inheritance relationship and deliberate choices. On the other hand, the performance system, as another external aspect, interacts with and evolves alongside the music system in a more subtle and less overt manner. This process is challenging to capture directly, but we can observe the results of this evolution in the changes within the art form itself. By examining these outcomes, we can confirm the existence of this evolutionary process, and subsequently, by following the chronological logic of artistic evolution, we can trace the subtle traces of this process.

The establishment of the script system reveals a less evident inheritance relationship. The exploration of “old forms” did not directly provide Yuan miscellaneous drama with experiences but rather indicated a direction for the system through the aggregation of performance practice experiences. As Mr. Wang Guowei suggested, “It can be seen that Yuan miscellaneous drama, while possessing its own unique features, did not arise solely from innovation.” (Wang Guowei, 2020) The formation of art is inevitably a gradual process, and Yuan miscellaneous drama is no exception. The forms of Yuan drama not only inherited “existing forms” but also became exemplary for future Chinese theatrical forms. Delving into the source of Yuan miscellaneous drama’s “forms” and breaking free from the constraints of artistic systems, it plays a pivotal role in the development of “forms” in Chinese theater throughout history.

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