
CHRONOLOGY OF HISTORICAL EVENTS



ZHOU DYNASTY (CA. 1046–256 BCE)

ca. 1046–256 BCE Emergence of the Great Exorcism rituals (*Danu*), often associated with New Year's festivities, where clamorous sound is crucial for ritual purposes (chap. 15; chap. 16)

Late sixth century BCE The killing of the powerful ministers of the Zhao family in the state of Jin as recorded in the *Zuo Tradition* (*Zuozhuan*), the ultimate source material for the Yuan *zaju* play *The Orphan of Zhao* by Ji Junxiang (fl. thirteenth century) (chap. 5)

HAN DYNASTY (206 BCE–220 CE)

First century BCE The earliest positive portrait of jesters as an embodiment of a remonstrative tradition associated with Confucian ideals of government service, in *The Records of the Historian* (*Shiji*) by Sima Qian (ca. 135–ca. 85 BCE), China's most influential history (Introduction)

THREE KINGDOMS (SHU, WU, WEI) PERIOD (220–280)

AND THE JIN DYNASTY (265–420)

161–223 Lifetime of Liu Bei, member of the Peach Orchard Brotherhood; founder of the state of Shu Han in the Three Kingdoms period and its first ruler (chap. 16)

Early third century Death of Guan Yu, member of the Peach Orchard Brotherhood; famed warrior and eventual god of war (chap. 3; chap. 16)

221 Death of Zhang Fei, member of the Peach Orchard Brotherhood; an impetuous warrior (chap. 3; chap. 16)

SOUTHERN AND NORTHERN DYNASTIES (420–589)

Sixth century Earliest record of the story of Mulan, "Poem of Mulan" ("Mulan shi") (chap. 6)

TANG DYNASTY (618–907)

Early seventh century The development of entertainment districts catering to aspiring civil service examination candidates (chap. 1)

	Establishment of the Office of Music Instruction (<i>Jiaofang si</i>), in charge of songs, dances, and theater for court performances (chap. 13)
712–756	The reign of Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang, whose romance with the Prized Consort Yang (Yang Guifei, Yang Yuhuan, 719–756) became source material for later romantic fiction and drama, including <i>Palace of Everlasting Life</i> (<i>Changsheng dian</i>) (chap. 12)
	Establishment of the Pear Garden (<i>liyuan</i>) by Emperor Xuanzong as a conservatory for the training of musicians and performers at court (chap. 13)
	The Prized Consort Yang creates a dance to “The Melody of Rainbow Skirts and Feathered Robes” (<i>nichang yuyi qu</i>) (chap. 12)
755–763	An Lushan instigates a rebellion against the imperial house of Tang that drives Emperor Xuanzong into exile (chap. 12)
756	Sacrificial death of the Prized Consort Yang to quell mutiny during the An Lushan Rebellion (chap. 12)
Late ninth to early tenth centuries	Emergence of “transformation texts” (<i>bianwen</i>), a form of storytelling geared toward illiterate lay audiences via images and narrative (Introduction; chap. 3; chap. 15)
(KHITAN) LIAO DYNASTY (907–1125)	
Tenth to eleventh centuries	Battles of Chinese generals against the Liao that became source material for Ming court plays (chap. 2)
NORTHERN SONG DYNASTY (960–1127)	
960–1127	Skits, farces, and more developed plays are performed as part of the variety shows in urban playhouses known as “Song <i>zaju</i> ” (chap. 1)
	Transformation of the <i>nuo</i> ceremony into a form of dramatic entertainment (<i>nuoxi</i>) (chap. 16)
Tenth to eleventh centuries	Chantefable stories (<i>shuochang cihua</i>) are told by professional storytellers in urban theaters and by itinerant storytellers traveling through villages (chap. 16)
Twelfth century onward	Emergence of “Wenzhou <i>zaju</i> ” or “Yongjia <i>zaju</i> ” (later known as “early southern drama” [<i>nanxi, xiwen</i>]) in the southern regions of the Yangzi River (Introduction; chap. 1; chap. 7)

Visual records of processions, musical troupes, and performances, including paintings, murals, tiles, and reliefs of theatrical role types (chap. 4; chap. 9)

(TANGUT) XI XIA DYNASTY (1038–1227)

Eleventh to twelfth centuries Battles of Chinese generals against the Xi Xia that became source material for Ming court plays (chap. 2)

(JURCHEN) JIN DYNASTY (1115–1234)

1153 Establishment of the capital of the Jin dynasty under the name of Zhongdu (Central Capital) in the area of modern Beijing (chap. 2)

ca. 1200 Composition of *The Story of the Western Wing in All Keys and Modes* (*Xixiang ji zhugongdiao*) by Dong Jieyuan (fl. 1200), the only surviving complete text of an “all keys and modes” (*zhugongdiao*) ballad (chap. 1; chap. 8)

1215 Mongol invasion of Zhongdu (chap. 3)
Visual records of theater performance, including paintings, murals, tiles, reliefs, stone carvings, and figurines of musicians and theatrical role types found in northern China (chap. 4; chap. 9)

SOUTHERN SONG DYNASTY (1127–1279)

Twelfth to thirteenth centuries The rise of the backstage in theater architecture (chap. 9)
Visual records of processions and theater performance, including paintings, reliefs, and figurines of theatrical role types found in southern China (chap. 4; chap. 9)

(MONGOL) YUAN DYNASTY (1271–1368)

1271–1368 The first flowering of full-fledged theater in dynastic China (Introduction; chap. 2)

ca. 1220–after 1279 Lifetime of Guan Hanqing, the purported founder of mature *zaju* theater and its most prolific playwright (chap. 1; chap. 3)

1227–1293 Lifetime of Hu Zhiyu, a scholar-official and theater aficionado, noted for critical writings on female performers, including Zhulian xiu (chap. 3)

ca. 1270–1300 The approximate period when the leading female *zaju* performer Zhulian xiu was active (chap. 3)

Late thirteenth century Composition of *The Story of the Western Wing* (*Xixiang ji*) by Wang Shifu (fl. second part of

- the thirteenth century), China's most famous love comedy in a modified northern *zaju* drama format (chap. 1; chap. 4; chap. 8)
- 1324 Publication of the earliest extant treatise on singing, *Discourse of Singing (Changlun)* by Yannan zhi'an (fl. early fourteenth century) (Introduction)
- Dated inscription for the mural "Zhongdu xiu from the Great Guild of Roving Troupes Performed Here" ("Dahang sanyue Zhongdu xiu zaici zuochang") in the Hall of Mingying wang in Shanxi province (Introduction; chap. 4; chap. 9)
- 1330s–1340s Publication of various recensions of *Rhymes of the Central Plain (Zhongyuan yinyun)* by Zhou Deqing (1277–1365), an influential formulary and work of criticism for *zaju* drama and *sanqu* songs (Introduction)
- Mid-fourteenth century Publication of *Register of Ghosts (Lugui bu)* by Zhong Sicheng (ca. 1277–after 1345), which included short biographies of over eighty playwrights (chap. 5)
- Fourteenth century onward The genre of the "all keys and modes" (*zhugongdiao*) ballad disappears from performance (chap. 1)
- Mid-fourteenth century Publication of the earliest extant *zaju* recensions later collected in *Thirty Yuan-Printed Zaju Plays (Yuankan zaju sanshi zhong)* (Introduction), including *Purple Clouds* (chap. 2), *The Pavilion for Praying to the Moon* (chap. 3), and *The Orphan of Zhao* (chap. 5)
- Composition of *The Lute (Pipa ji)* by Gao Ming (ca. 1305–ca. 1370), the first individually authored play in the tradition of southern drama (*nanxi*) (Introduction; chap. 7)
- 1360s Compilation of *The Record of the Green Bowers (Qinglou ji)* by Xia Tingzhi (ca. 1300–1375), a collection of biographies of female performers (Introduction; chap. 2; chap. 3)
- MING DYNASTY (1368–1644)
- 1384 The official and permanent reinstatement of the civil service examination system of the Ming dynasty (chap. 7)
- ca. 1398 Compilation of *Formulary of Correct Prosody of the Era of Great Peace (Taihe zhengyin pu)* by Zhu

- Quan (1378–1448), which classifies the then-known *zaju* corpus into “Twelve Categories of Northern Drama” (“Zaju shi’er ke”) (chap. 2; chap. 3)
- 1408 Compilation of the imperial encyclopedia manuscript *Great Canon of the Yongle Era* (*Yongle dadian*) which included the earliest-known versions of early southern *nanxi* drama (Introduction; chap. 1; chap. 2; chap. 7)
- 1400s–1440s The successive publication of plays by Zhu Youdun (1379–1439) that shaped later typographic conventions for play imprints (chap. 1)
- After 1435 Civil service graduates dominating the politics at court (chap. 7)
- 1478 Publication of *The Story of Hua Guan Suo in Prose and Song* (*Hua Guan Suo zhuan*), the only extant complete rendition of the story of Hua Guan Suo, the fictional son of the great warrior Guan Yu (chap. 16)
- 1499 Publication of the earliest preserved complete text of *The Story of the Western Wing*, known as the Hongzhi edition, renowned for its handscroll-like, woodblock-printed illustrations (chap. 1; chap. 4)
- ca. 1522–1527 Creation of the “polished” style of music (*shuimo diao*, literally “water mill tunes”) by Wei Liangfu (ca. 1489–1566), the foundational music of the Kunqu dramatic tradition, representing a synthesis of northern and southern music (Introduction)
- 1527–1602 Lifetime of Li Zhi (style name Li Zhuowu), the alleged commentator of many drama and fiction imprints (Introduction; chap. 4)
- Sixteenth century The genre of “southern *nanxi* drama” develops into the form of *chuanqi* drama (Introduction; chap. 1)
- 1548–1604 Lifetime of Ma Shouzhen, the notable Nanjing-based courtesan, playwright, and owner of a courtesan theater troupe (Introduction)
- 1558 Composition of *Washing Silk* (*Huansha ji*) by Liang Chenyu (1519–1591), the first drama set in the Kunqu musical style (Introduction; chap. 8)
- 1550s Composition of *The Southern Western Wing* by Li Rihua (fl. 1550s?), a seminal adaptation of

- The Story of the Western Wing* in the Kunqu style (chap. 8)
- 1559 Publication of *A Record of Southern Ci* (*Nanci xulu*) by Xu Wei (1521–1593), the first significant discussion of southern drama as an art form (Introduction; chap. 7)
- 1566 Composition of *The Crying Phoenix* (*Mingfeng ji*) and the emergence of the topical “drama on current affairs” (*shishiju*) as a means to expose malfeasance, attack political rivals, or both (Introduction; chap. 10)
- Late sixteenth century Emergence of a new school of Confucianism, the School of the Mind (*xinxue*), whose followers celebrated human emotions and desires in fiction and drama in what modern scholars term a cult of *qing* (chap. 12)
- 1570s Elements of theatrical performance began to appear in book illustrations (chap. 4)
- 1570s–1640s Heightened factionalism dominates the Ming government (Introduction; chap. 4; chap. 10)
- 1580–1644 Lifetime of Ling Mengchu, a well-known editor-publisher of drama and writer of fiction (chap. 4)
- 1580s Publication of the first extant version of *The Injustice to Dou E* (*Gantian dongdi Dou E yuan*) (chap. 3)
- Publication of Xu Wei’s collection of four *zaju* plays, *Four Cries of a Gibbon* (*Sisheng yuan*), including *The Female Mulan Joins the Army in Place of Her Father* (*Ci Mulan tifu congjun*) (chap. 6)
- 1582 Publication of the earliest extant and most influential dramatic version of the Mulian play, a three-volume text written by the Ming-dynasty literatus Zheng Zhizhen (1518–1595) (chap. 15)
- ca. 1591–ca. 1671 Lifetime of Li Yu, the most representative and prolific playwright of the Suzhou School dramatists (chap. 14)
- 1597–1684 Lifetime of Zhang Dai, a well-known literatus and theater aficionado noted for his critical writings on drama criticism and personal experience with dramatic performance (Introduction; chap. 15)

1598	Composition of <i>The Peony Pavilion</i> (<i>Mudan ting</i>) by Tang Xianzu (1550–1616), the most renowned and influential Chinese <i>chuanqi</i> drama (chap. 9)
Early seventeenth century	Full maturity of Kunqu performance, China's oldest continuously performed operatic form (chap. 8)
ca. 1602	Composition of Tang Xianzu's "Epigraph for the Temple for Theater God Master Qingyuan in Yihuang County" ("Yihuang xian xishen Qingyuan shi miao ji"), a powerful literati apologia for the transformative power of theater (Introduction; chap. 3; chap. 9)
1604	The emergence of the Eastern Grove faction (Donglin) as an important force in dynastic politics (chap. 10) A documented performance of the complete northern-style <i>zaju</i> <i>The Story of the Western Wing</i> by Ma Shouzhen's troupe (Introduction)
1610	The Rongyutang, one of the best-known publishing houses of Hangzhou, brought out an influential literati-flavored version of <i>The Story of the Western Wing</i> , combining poetry, painting, and calligraphy (chap. 4)
1611–1680	Lifetime of Li Yu an influential and prolific critic and writer of fiction and drama and theatrical troupe owner (chap. 10; chap. 11)
1615–1616	Compilation of <i>Select Yuan Plays</i> (<i>Yuanqu xuan</i>) by Zang Maoxun (1550–1620), the most influential anthology of Yuan <i>zaju</i> drama (Introduction; chap. 2)
1621–1627	The reign of Emperor Tianqi; dominated by the eunuch Wei Zhongxian (1568–1627) and his associates, who seek to purge members of the Eastern Grove faction (Introduction; chap. 10)
1628–1644	The reign of Emperor Chongzhen; final period of the Ming dynasty, during which the members of the eunuch faction are punished (chap. 10)
ca. 1629	Establishment of the Restoration Society (Fushe), a literary successor to the Eastern Grove faction (chap. 10)
1633	Restoration Society scholars claim that the play <i>The Green Peony</i> (<i>Lü mudan</i>) mocks its members and petition for an official ban (chap. 10)

- 1634 Composition of *The Spring Lantern Riddles* (*Chundeng mi*), the earliest play by Ruan Dacheng (1587–1646) (chap. 10)
- 1639 Circulation of “Proclamation against Treachery in Nanjing” (“Liudu fangluan gongjie”), directed against Ruan Dacheng (chap. 10)
- 1639–1640 Publication of *The Exclusive Edition of Western Wing* designed by Chen Hongshou (1598–1652), who adapts literati painting techniques to woodblock carving and vice versa (chap. 4)
- 1642 Composition of *Swallow’s Letter* (*Yanzi jian*), arguably the best-known play by Ruan Dacheng (chap. 10)
- 1618–1655 Mao Xiang (1611–1693) and other Restoration Society scholars gather to watch a performance of *Swallow’s Letter* by Ruan Dacheng’s family troupe in Nanjing, applauding the performance while condemning the playwright (chap. 10)
- 1618–1655 Lifetime of Hou Fangyu, a scholar-official, writer, and a respected member of the Restoration Society, whose romance with the courtesan Li Xiangjun (1624–1653) is the source material for the famous historical play *The Peach Blossom Fan* (*Taohua shan*) (Introduction; chap. 12)
- QING DYNASTY (1644–1912)
- 1645 Establishment of the Southern Ming regime in Nanjing, marked by the enthronement of Zhu Yousong (1607–1646) as the Emperor Hongguang (chap. 12)
- ca. 1650s Compilation of *Sixty Plays* (*Liushi zhong qu*) by Mao Jin (1599–1659), an influential compendium of mostly *chuanqi* drama (Introduction; chap. 8)
- ca. 1661 Publication of *The Sixth Book of Genius* (*Diliu caizishu*) by Jin Shengtan (1610–1661), the most widely circulated version of *The Story of the Western Wing* in the Qing dynasty, featuring Jin’s extensive interlinear commentary (chap. 1)
- 1671 Publication of Li Yu’s *Leisure Notes* (*Xianqing ouji*), the most systematic theatrical treatise in dynastic China (chap. 10; chap. 11; chap. 15)
- 1671 onward Imperial edicts are issued to prohibit playhouses from operating within the Inner City and to

- forbid high officials and bannermen from attending performances in commercial theaters (chap. 14)
- 1688 Composition of *Palace of Everlasting Life* (*Changsheng dian*) by Hong Sheng (1645–1704), a historical *chuanqi* play centered on the romance between Emperor Xuanzong and the Prized Consort Yang, which was so popular that it even traveled to Vietnam (chap. 12)
- 1699–1708 Composition (1699) and publication (1708) of the famous historical play *The Peach Blossom Fan* by Kong Shangren (1648–1718), which decisively shaped the collective memory of the political history of the Ming-Qing dynastic transition (chap. 10; chap. 12)
- 1720s The Jesuit missionary Joseph de Prémare (1666–1736) prepares a partial translation of *The Orphan of Zhao* (*Zhao shi gu'er*) into French, the first such endeavor in a European language (chap. 3; chap. 5)
- 1735–1736 Publication of the compilation *Description de la Chine* (*The Universal History of China*) by J. B. du Halde (1674–1743) (chap. 1), in which he characterizes *The Orphan of Zhao* as a tragedy (chap. 3; chap. 5)
- 1736–1796 The reign of Emperor Qianlong, during which Chinese court theater reaches its height, being used for political, ritual, and entertainment purposes (chap. 13)
- 1746 Publication of *The Formulary of Northern and Southern Tunes in the Great Anthology of the Nine Modes* (*Jiugong dacheng nanbeici gongpu*, alternatively translated as *Great Compilation of Musical Scores from the Southern and Northern Arias in All Nine Modes*), a magisterial comprehensive court-sponsored anthology of both northern and southern musical tunes (chap. 8; chap. 14)
- 1746–1799 Lifetime of Heshen, the powerful and reputedly corrupt Manchu grand councilor and former imperial guardsman, who is believed to be the inspiration for the lead villain in *The Eight-Court Pearl* (*Bachao zhu*) (chap. 14)

1753	Publication of Voltaire's adaptation of <i>Orphan of Zhao</i> , <i>L'orphelin de la Chine</i> (<i>The Orphan of China</i>) (chap. 5)
Mid-eighteenth century	Rearranged scenes (<i>zhezixi</i>) become the norm of Kunqu performance, which prompts the publication of anthologized Kunqu performance scripts (chap. 8)
ca. 1750–ca. 1800	Development of a new “fanzine” literature (<i>huapu</i>)—that is, catalogs of star “boy actresses,” who cross-dress to perform the young ingenue (<i>dan</i>) roles (Introduction; chap. 14)
1772	Emperor Qianlong officially bans all female performers in Beijing (chap. 11)
Early nineteenth century	Performance experimentations of several Hui troupes (<i>Huiban</i>) in the capital, including the famous Hechun Troupe, which plant a seed for the eventual development of Peking opera (Introduction; chap. 14)
1814	After suppressing an uprising targeting the imperial palace, Emperor Jiaqing (r. 1796–1820) issues an edict proscribing the commercial theatrical performance of martial plays in the capital (chap. 14)
Late nineteenth century	Emergence of the theatrical form of <i>jingju</i> (literally “capital opera,” alternatively translated as “Peking opera” and “Beijing opera”), which later advances to the status of a “national theater” (<i>guoju</i>) in the twentieth century (Introduction)
1894–1961	Lifetime of Mei Lanfang, the eminent female impersonator in Kunqu performance and Peking opera (Introduction; chap. 8; chap. 14)
MODERN CHINA (1912–PRESENT)	
1913–1914	Publication, in installments, of <i>A Study of Song and Yuan Drama</i> (<i>Song Yuan xiqu kao</i> , also known as <i>Song Yuan xiqu shi</i>) by Wang Guowei (1877–1927), the seminal history and criticism of early Chinese song-drama (Introduction; chap. 5)
1914	Collective publication of <i>Thirty Yuan-Printed Zaju Plays</i> (<i>Yuankan zaju sanshi zhong</i>) (Introduction; chap. 3; chap. 4; chap. 5)
1919–1960	Mei Lanfang tours abroad in Japan (1919), the United States (1930), the Soviet Union (1935, 1952, 1957, 1960), and European countries

- including Poland, Germany, France, Belgium, and Great Britain (1935) (Introduction)
- 1920 Discovery of the southern *nanxi* drama volume *Great Canon of the Yongle Era* (*Yongle dadian*) by Ye Gongchuo (1881–1968) (chap. 7)
- Appearance of the first silent film of Mei Lanfang performing the scene “Chunxiang Throws the Classroom into Uproar” (“Chunxiang naoxue”) from *The Peony Pavilion* (Introduction)
- 1920s Reception of *The Story of the Western Wing* as an exemplary play of “free love” among reforming and revolutionary intellectuals during the May Fourth Movement (chap. 1)
- 1927 Release of the silent film *The Story of the Western Wing* (*Xixiang ji*, also translated as *Romance of the Western Chamber*), adapted from Wang Shifu’s *zaju* drama *The Story of Western Wing*, directed by Hou Yao (1903–1942); the first Chinese movie to be shown abroad (chap. 1; Visual Resources)
- 1950s–1960s Heyday of Chinese opera film (Introduction; Visual Resources)
- 1957 Establishment of the Northern Kunqu Opera Theater (Beifang Kunqu juyuan), the only Kunqu opera troupe in northern China (Visual Resources)
- 1958–59 Official celebrations of Guan Hanqing’s 700th anniversary with a Shanxi-based Puzhou opera (*puju*) film version of *The Injustice to Dou E* (*Dou E yuan*) (chap. 3; Visual Resources)
- 1964 Release of the Shaw Brothers’ Huangmei opera film *Hua Mulan*, adapted from the story of Mulan, which gains popularity in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, and elsewhere in southeast Asia (chap. 6)
- 1967 Discovery of *The Collected Chantefables from the Ming-Dynasty Chenghua Reign* (1464–1487) (*Ming Chenghua shuochang cihua congkan*) in a tomb in Jiading county (present-day Shanghai) (chap. 16)
- 1978 Establishment of the Shanghai Kunqu Opera Troupe (Shanghai Kunju tuan) (Visual Resources)

- 2001 Kunqu opera designated as a Masterpiece of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (chap. 8)
- 2003 Official celebrations of the 850th anniversary of the establishment of the Jin capital of Zhongdu/ present-day Beijing with the play *A Playboy from a Noble House Opts for the Wrong Career* (*Huanmen zidi cuo lishen*) (chap. 2; Visual Resources)
- 2004 Premiere of the “Youth Edition” of *The Peony Pavilion*, which toured in universities all over China and beyond (Visual Resources)
- 2012 The staging of *The Orphan of Zhao* in Britain, adapted by the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) as their first attempt at transforming a classical Chinese play into Shakespearean drama (chap. 5)
- 2016 Official celebrations of the 500th anniversary of the deaths of Tang Xianzu (1550–1616) and William Shakespeare (ca. 1564–1616) (Introduction; Visual Resources)