

**CUI HU'S MURAL POEM AND ITS RESONANCE IN THE STORY OF "RENMIAN  
TAOHUA": A DIALOGIC ANALYSIS**

by

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This thesis studies the poetry-story relationship with an analysis of Cui Hu's 崔護 poem and its resonance in the story of "renmian taohua" 人面桃花 (Beauty and Peach Blossoms). More specifically, I discuss how a Tang Dynasty poem inspired the formation of "renmian taohua" as a literary trope while various forms of adaptation of Cui Hu's romance shaped the cultural implications of it from late Tang Dynasty to the present. First appearing in *Benshi shi* (Storied Poems) 本事詩, a late Tang anthology of anecdotes edited by Meng Qi 孟榮, Cui Hu's poem was represented in a romantic story, which evolved into different genres across different periods. By tracing the evolution of the romance and particularly focusing on one drama adaptation by the playwright Meng Chengshun 孟稱舜 (1598 – 1684) in late Ming Dynasty, I argue that the interaction between poetry and story narratives contextualized a *dialogic* context where a "collective memory" of the poem was shaped and represented in the form of a commonly used literary trope. Drawing upon Bakhtin's notion of *dialogism*, I follow two threads in this study: one is the phrase "renmian taohua" as a multi-cultural discourse of romance and women; the other is the significance of a poetic genre that was popularized in the Ming-Qing period, which I define as "embedded poems" in this essay.

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

This thesis studies the poetry-story relationship with an analysis of Cui Hu's 崔護 poem and its resonance in the story of "renmian taohua" 人面桃花 (Beauty and Peach Blossoms). More specifically, I discuss how a Tang Dynasty poem attributed to Cui Hu inspired the formation of "renmian taohua" as a literary trope while various forms of adaptation of Cui Hu's romance shaped the cultural implications of it from late Tang Dynasty to the present. First appearing in *Benshi shi* (*Storied Poems*) 本事詩, a late Tang anthology of anecdotes edited by Meng Qi 孟榮, Cui Hu's poem was represented in a romantic story, which evolved into different genres across different periods. By tracing the evolution of the romance and particularly focusing on one drama adaptation by the playwright Meng Chengshun 孟稱舜 (1598 – 1684) in late Ming Dynasty, I argue that the interaction between poetry and story narratives contextualized a *dialogic* context where a "collective memory" of the poem was shaped and represented in the form of a commonly used literary trope. As we will see in the thesis, this *dialogic* process demonstrates the significance of a poetic genre that reached its culmination of prominence in the Ming-Qing period, which I define as "embedded poems" in this essay.

## 1.1 “EMBEDDED POEMS” AS A GENRE

Classical Chinese poetry was not often presented by itself, but rather associated with different forms of representation, such as music, dancing and recitation practices. These forms of representation were important in poetic construction because they determined certain patterns of communication, circulation and perception of the poems. In late Tang Dynasty, a new type of poetry appeared, where poems were embedded within stories and evolved as various story narratives emerged across periods. During this evolutionary process, popular forms of narrative, especially fiction and drama that prospered from the economic growth and burgeoning of public entertainment in the Ming Dynasty,<sup>1</sup> then became an important medium of representation that shaped the defining characteristics of “embedded poems.”

Some historians and critics contended that the tradition of embedded poems in fiction and drama originated from the chanting and recitation literature 講唱文學 (*jiangchang wenxue*) produced in the Tang Dynasty.<sup>2</sup> As one of the early texts of the chanting and recitation literature, Tang transformation texts 變文 (*bianwen*) had some basic identifying characteristics that comprised the current working definition of the genre.<sup>3</sup> One was the “verse-introductory formula,” where performers used poetry to initiate storytelling as well as the whole recitation process. In the Ming-Qing period, different types of chanting and performing literature, such as *guci* 鼓詞 (drum lyrics), *zidishu* 子弟書 (Manchu bannermen tales), *tanci* 彈詞 (plucking

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<sup>1</sup> Timothy Brook, *The Confusions of Pleasure: Commerce and Culture in Ming China*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.

<sup>2</sup> Ye Dejun 葉德均, *Song Yuan Ming jiangchang wenxue* 宋元明講唱文學, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959.

<sup>3</sup> Victor Mair, *Tang Transformation Texts: a study of the Buddhist contribution to the rise of vernacular fiction and drama in China*, Cambridge, Mass.: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University: Distributed by Harvard University Press, 1989, p15.

rhymes), *cihua* 詞話, and *baojuan* 寶卷 (precious scrolls), included poems to stimulate stories, thus adding to the charm of performances.<sup>4</sup>

Most of the poems embedded within this body of literature were created by playwrights, fiction writers or performers of the chanting texts. The composition and position of the poems were determined by the need of the chanting texts or the stories expressed in them. Poems in *Jin ping mei ci hua* 金瓶梅詞話 and *Hong lou meng* 紅樓夢 (*The Dream of the Red Chamber*), for example, are cases of this type.<sup>5</sup> Neither the pornographic nor predictive implications of the poems would meet with their assumed purposes if they did not appear in the context of the whole work. They will be exposed to a different set of criteria for judgment if extracted from their contexts, which would change their role and status in the group of Ming-Qing poetry. In this situation, the relationship between poetry and story narratives becomes very important in terms of poetic appreciation and evaluation.

However, for texts that had a long history of adaptation and recreation, this relationship became complicated. Cui Hu's 崔護 mural poem in the story of "*renmian taohua*" 人面桃花 (Beauty and Peach Blossoms) is a good example to explore this relationship.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Xue Jiatai 薛家太, "Ming qing de jiang chang wen xue" 明清的讲唱文學, *Zhongguo tongsu wenxue shi gang* 中國通俗文學史綱, Beijing: Zhongguo kuangye daxue chubanshe, 1993, pp. 222-32.

<sup>5</sup> This type of embedded poems was popular in Ming-Qing fiction and drama. More examples could be seen in texts such as Feng Menglong's "Three Speeches" (*sanya* 三言), *Sanguo yanyi* 三國演義 (*Romance of the Three Kingdoms*) and et cetera.

<sup>6</sup> Among poems anthologized in *Benshi shi*, Cui Hu's poem and story was one of the few cases that enjoyed a long history of generic adaptation in later dynasties. Most other poems were recorded faithfully in later anthologies such as *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記 (*Extensive Records of the Grand Tranquility Reign*), but they were more of transcriptions instead of adaptation.

## 1.2 CUI HU'S POEM IN *BENSHI SHI*

On a brisk day of Qingming in the Tang Dynasty, Cui Hu,<sup>7</sup> a disappointed civil service examination candidate, arrived at a secluded village south of the Capital Chang'an 長安 during his recreational exploration. On requesting some water, he met a pretty girl with whom he immediately fell in love, and for whom he returned to the village again the following year. Expecting the girl of his dreams, he instead found only the splendid scenery of peach blossoms greeting his return. Driven by melancholy over losing the girl, Cui Hu inscribed a poem on the wall:<sup>8</sup>

“This very day last year, oh, at this very place, A pretty face mirrored the flowers of peach trees. <sup>9</sup> I do not know today where shines the pretty face; Only the pretty flowers still smile in vernal breeze.”	去年今日此門中， 人面桃花相映紅。 人面祇今何處在， 桃花依舊笑春風。 <sup>10</sup>
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Recorded in *Benshi shi* 本事詩 (*Storied Poems*), a Tang Dynasty poetry anthology edited by Meng Qi 孟棻 (fl. 841-886), this is the earliest trace of Cui Hu's poem and the context of its

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<sup>7</sup> Evidence of Cui Hu being a historical person is scarce. Both his biography and the record of his works in Tang and Song dynasties have kept ambiguous and unreliable as the romantic tale between a girl and him recorded in *Benshi shi* was always interwoven in them. Besides the accounts in *Benshi shi*, the major sources of his biography are *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書 (*Old Tang History*) and *Tangshi jishi* 唐詩紀事 (*Recording the Events of Tang Poems*); and his complete six poems are anthologized in the *Quan Tang Shi* 全唐詩 (*Complete Poetry of the Tang*). And since the Song Dynasty, more often the case is that Cui Hu remained remembered as the protagonist of the romance “remain taohua” (Beauty and Peach Blossoms), which is widely popularized in fiction and drama. Thus, it would be safer and more accurate to simply suggest the close relationship between this poem and the person called “Cui Hu” who was thought to have written it.

<sup>8</sup> Rephrased from the story in *Benshi shi*. Meng, Qi 孟棻, *Benshi shi* 本事詩, Yangshan gushi wenfang 陽山顧氏文房, vol. 2. Baibu congshu jicheng 百部叢書集成, Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan, 1965, pp.19 - 20. For the entire original Chinese story in *Benshi shi*, see Appendix A.

<sup>9</sup> Yu Yuanhong translated this line as “a pretty face outshone the flowers of peach trees.” I changed “outshone” into “mirrored” to make the translation more accurate to the original Chinese. Other parts of the translation are Xu Yuanhong's translation.

<sup>10</sup> Trans by Xu Yuanhong 許淵沖, in *Zhongguo gushi jingpin sanbai shou* 中國古詩精品三百首, Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2004, p297. This poem is compiled into the *Complete Poetry of the Tang* 全唐詩 as one of the six poems attributed to Cui Hu, where it is titled “Inscribed on Walls of A Village South of the Capital” 題都城南庄, and accompanied with the story recorded in *Benshi shi*. Peng Dingqiu 彭定求 eds., *Quan Tang Shi* 全唐詩 (*Complete Poetry of the Tang*), vol. 11, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960, pp. 4147-8.

composition. As a government official who had withdrawn from the court, Meng Qi collected these anecdotes and stories from a variety of localities, selecting and adapting them for his anthology.<sup>11</sup> In Meng's preface to *Benshi shi*, he mentioned his motives and methods in compiling the work:

“Exquisite compositions of lyricism and elegant words of admonition may be recorded in myriad books filling up shelves and overflowing cabinets, but instances in them of being moved to intone a poem by encountering events are what really cause one's feelings to well up. If these instances are not manifested, then who will comprehend their significance? So I gathered them together in a book called *Storied Poems*. In all there are seven headings akin to the Four Beginnings [of the Classic of Poetry]: 1) Moved by Feelings, 2) Moved by Events, 3) Highly Unconventional, 4) Resentment and Frustration, 5) Signs of the Strange, 6) Signs of Ill Omens, and 7) Mocking and Jesting. I have assembled every one according to its category. In some cases, I have just selected the important part and not the whole poem. For each one I have fashioned a “Lesser Preface” to introduce it. I offer them to all fellow enthusiasts. In the passages drawn from strange tales and bizarre records I have omitted anything of doubtful veracity. I also did not include anything of a rude or vulgar nature.”<sup>12</sup>

抒情佳作，諷刺雅言著于群書，雖盈廚溢閣，其間觸事興詠，尤所鐘情，不有發揮，孰明厥義。因采為本事詩，凡七題，猶四始也。情感，事感，高逸，怨憤，徵異，徵咎，嘲戲，各以其類聚之，亦有獨掇其要，不全篇者，咸為小序以引之，貽諸好事。其有出諸異傳怪錄，疑非是實者，則略之。拙俗鄙俚，亦所不取。

This preface contains several pieces of information: first, the purpose of recording the story was to understand the poem; second, the stories were not just “transcribed” by Meng Qi, but also developed (*fahui*) and fashioned by him; third, Meng had a clear criteria for what was “elegant” and what was “vulgar,” which guided his selection and compilation of the book. Meng was trying to give the poems and stories an authoritative voice by associating them with

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<sup>11</sup> Graham Sanders, *Words Well Put: Visions of Poetic Competence in the Chinese Tradition*, Harvard-Yenching Institute Monographs Series 60, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006.

<sup>12</sup> Trans by Graham Sanders, *Words Well Put*, pp.172-94.

canonical discourses such as the “four beginnings” 四始.<sup>13</sup> Apparently he did not see the work as “less important,” the style of writing that *Benshi shi* was then categorized into by some critics.<sup>14</sup> So, based on the information, what was a “story” in *Benshi shi*? How could we understand the nature of it, and then, perceive the poetry-story relationship?

Many critics have tried to provide an answer by discussing the generic character of “*benshi*.” As analyzed later in the thesis, this Tang Dynasty book opened up a new “genre” that called up different imitations, developments and adaptations in following dynasties. All the rewriting of *Benshi shi* leads to the conclusion that it generically transcends the boundaries between history, anecdotes, miscellaneous jottings and poetic criticism.

An examination of Cui Hu’s romance might provide further insight into the poetry-story relationship. Falling into the category of “*qinggan*” 情感 (Moved by Feelings), Cui Hu’s story distinguished itself with its diverse “afterlives” in Ming-Qing popular writing. Although many other stories in *Benshi shi* also enjoyed long histories of recording and recreating, Cui Hu’s romance, as far as I can tell, was quite typical in the sense that fiction and drama greatly enhanced its cultural significance and popularity. As we will see in this thesis, the dynamics of this comes from the interaction between the poem and its surrounding narratives. From the Song (960-1279) to the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), Cui Hu’s story was adapted into a wide variety of different forms and genres, spanning historical biography, fiction and drama.<sup>15</sup> All these adaptations captured different pieces of information of the poem and developed them from

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<sup>13</sup> “Four beginnings” means the four poems at the beginning of the *Airs* 風, *Minor Odes* 小雅, *Major Odes* 大雅 and *Hymns* 頌 in *Shijing*. Graham Sanders’ analysis of Meng’s “Preface to *Benshi shi*” in *Words Well Put* elaborated on this point. From the perspective of rhetoric, Sanders analyzed that Meng was writing his preface in an authoritative voice by using the languages and literary categories set up by orthodox and classic texts such as the “Great Preface” to *Shijing*. Sanders, *Words Well Put*, pp. 165-202.

<sup>14</sup> For example, Ming Dynasty scholar Hu Yinglin 胡應麟 categorized *Benshi shi* into “*xiaoshuo*”. I will elaborate on this later in the “Diachronic Dialogue” section.

<sup>15</sup> This essay focuses on the rewriting in the pre-modern periods.

various perspectives. Over a period of time, these discourses formed a community of words, in which the poem and the story were perceived and memorized.

Graham Sanders proposed the notion of “poetic competence” in his monograph *Words Well Put* to discuss the interactive relationship between poetry and its context of production.<sup>16</sup> According to his definition, “poetic competence” is “the term ... to designate the ability of a person to deploy poetic discourse as a means of affecting the attitude and behavior of another person in order to achieve a desired end.”<sup>17</sup> This concept emphasizes on the “operation of poetry”<sup>18</sup> in one single text and a certain context, but does not discuss the evolution of the text and how this process would have changed the poetry-narrative relationship. Drawing upon Sanders’ concept, I will pursue Cui Hu’s case from the perspective of perception, concentrating on the poetic operation of multiple versions of a single text, which I would like to name as “dialogic competence.” In this process, complex readership in later dynasties developed diverse and layered treatments of the original poem and story, thus forming a collective discourse in the society where the original poetic text was received as a unity full of *dialogues*.

### 1.3 DIALOGISM AND THE ENOVELISTIC DISCOURSE

In terms of the notion of *dialogue*, I draw upon Bakhtin’s theory of “dialogism” in his discussion of the modern novel. Although he never named the term himself,<sup>19</sup> this idea was well elaborated on in his article “Discourse in the Novel.” Situated in a time when poetic discourse largely

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<sup>16</sup> Graham Sanders, Introduction to *Words Well Put*, pp. 6-9.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p6.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Michael Holquist, *Dialogism: Bakhtin and His World*, second edition, London and New York: Routledge, 2002, p15.

determined the direction of literary analysis, the novel, as a modern 19<sup>th</sup> century genre, was placed into a long period of disputes. First relegated to be non-artistic and “the same as practical speech for everyday life or ... scientific purposes”<sup>20</sup> by literary critics because of its differing from a "poetic discourse," the novel was then for a moment approached mainly from a thematic perspective. Bakhtin contended that novel analysis should adopt both the thematic method as well as the linguistic approach.<sup>21</sup> His idea challenged the studies of the novel as a new genre, but the further contribution is to characterize the novel’s dialogic nature.

According to Bakhtin, the dialogic nature of a novel contains several aspects. One typical character is what he termed as “heteroglossia.” Heteroglossia, in contrast to the unity in a language system that consists of linguistic norms, seeks the “languages in the system of language” and “heterogeneous stylistic unities,”<sup>22</sup> which in the novel is usually represented as the multi-voices of characters and plural authorship of the work. As Bakhtin exemplified in his analysis, the best way to understand the generic feature of a novel is to look at a model where two people communicate at a certain place and certain time. It is the characters, instead of the acknowledged writer and narrator of the novel, that “author” their speeches, and the speeches are products of their individual social experiences, as well as the specific time and space. Therefore, the legitimacy of a single authoritative voice of the novel is dissolved, and the textuality of a novel is well connected to its sociality and historicity. Bakhtin termed this phenomenon as “historical poetics,” which acknowledged novel as a genre in the making as well as its manifestation of social stratifications in the 19<sup>th</sup> - Century Russia.

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<sup>20</sup> M.M.Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel,” *Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M.Bakhtin*, edited by Michael Holquist, trans by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981, p260.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.,p261.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

Applying the theory of dialogism to other forms of literary studies, Bakhtin proposed the concept of “novelistic discourse,” claiming, “the dialogic orientation of a word among other words (of all kinds and degrees of otherness) creates new and significant artistic potential in discourse... [and] the potential for a distinctive art of prose.”<sup>23</sup> The novelistic discourse is complex and plural in a sense that it involves the “stratification of literary languages.” “By stressing the intentional dimension of stratification in literary language,” Bakhtin claimed, “we are able...to locate in a single series such methodologically heterogeneous phenomena as professional and social dialects, world views and individual artistic works, for in their intentional dimension one finds that common plane on which they can all be juxtaposed, and juxtaposed dialogically.”<sup>24</sup> Dialogue between different genres and types of speech served the same roles with diverse characters of a novel in the complex text, where they featured their distinct nature and character, thus providing insight into both the changing perception of the genre and that of the major theme of the discourse.

The theory of “dialogism” contributes in two aspects to the analysis of Cui Hu’s romance: the multiple authorship and voices, and the constructive power of genres. Formulated in the late Tang Dynasty and lasted until the present, Cui Hu’s story has experienced adaptations by different authors, although most of them remained anonymous to the readership due to the remoteness of their time of composition and the convention of popular literature in pre-modern China. Also, along with the appearance of new literary genres since the Song Dynasty,<sup>25</sup> diverse generic adaptations developed the discursive system of the story in terms of its multiplicity of

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p275.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p293.

<sup>25</sup> Since the Song Dynasty, economic growth and urban development stimulated the prosperity of public entertainment as well as the creation of new genres, especially a variety of performing literature and popular literature. Dieter Kuhn’s work on Song Dynasty history gave a detailed account about this; and there is a large corpus of scholarship on different forms of performing and popular literature in the Song as well as the late imperial periods. Dieter Kuhn, *The Age of Confucian Rule: The Song Transformation of China*, Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009.

voices and richness in the meaning of the story, as a result of which, the romance was interwoven into a complex cultural reference of “*renmian taohua*.” The connotations of this phrase, together with all the implications the two major symbols of “*renmian*” (“beautiful faces” or “the beauty”) and “*taohua*” (peach blossoms) possessed, were the product of this dialogic process. As we will see later in the thesis, the implications of the phrase “*renmian taohua*” also experienced a transition from a classical romantic discourse into one of women.

#### 1.4 ROADMAP

The thesis will be further organized into two chapters. The first chapter is devoted to a case study of Meng Chengshun’s 孟稱舜 play titled *Taoyuan sanfang* 桃源三訪 (*The Three Visits to the Haven of Peach Blossoms*). After a brief overview of the evolution of Cui Hu’s story from the Song to the Ming dynasty, I will analyze how the original poem interacted with other forms of expression in the play, and how the play placed the poem in the typical discourse of “scholar-beauty” romance in the late Ming period. Then, I will proceed beyond the text to further explore the social dialogues between Meng and his literati friends, and how their exchanges accounted for the final production of the play. By contextualizing this process, I will also briefly discuss the power of popular literature in the formation of a recognized social language such as “*renmian taohua*.”

In the second chapter, I explore the cultural implications of the trope “*renmian taohua*.” After a brief analysis of the formation and evolution of “*renmian taohua*” as a multi-textual discourse, I use a modern opera and a contemporary novel to illustrate the application and development of the trope in a modern context. The two modern versions developed the discourse

in different ways, and in the contemporary novel the original poem and Cui Hu's story were even completely stripped out from the text; however, the close connections between the established meaning of the reference and the modern versions further demonstrated the on-going process of memory making. After reflecting on the significance of the poetry-story relationship as well as some key problems to be discussed in the following sections, I will conclude my thesis with a speculative discussion of the changing poetics in the Ming-Qing period.

## 2.0 DIALOGUING CUI HU'S MURAL POEM IN THE LATE MING DYNASTY: THE DIALOGIC IMAGINATION IN *THE THREE VISITS TO THE HAVEN OF PEACH BLOSSOMS*

In this chapter, I will focus on analyzing a case study of the “embedded poems” in the late Ming Dynasty, namely the adaptation of Cui Hu’s romance in a late Ming *zaju* 雜劇 play titled *Taoyuan sanfang* 桃源三訪 (*Three Visits to the Haven of Peach Blossoms*) by Meng Chengshun. I will explore how Cui Hu’s mural poem is presented in this play by groups of narratives, and how these narratives are shaped within diachronic and synchronic dialogues. After a careful textual analysis, I will expand my vision to look at how this construction might have been received and performed in late Ming society, and how it influenced the social imagination and perception of Cui Hu’s poem.

In the following sections, I will first briefly outline the shaping of a dialogic discourse from the Song to the Ming dynasty, concentrating on the way various generic discourses situated the poem in different social functions while simultaneously formulating a general language community in which the meaning of the poem was always expanded. Afterwards, I will draw on detailed textual analyses of the *Three Visits*, and examine Meng’s new treatment of the original poem from three perspectives --- the pictorial and narrative representation of the poem, the symbolic relationship between the peach blossoms and the female protagonist Ye Zhen Er 葉蓁兒, and the way the shared language of emotions (*qing*) in popular drama contextualizes the

death and resurrection of Zhen Er at the end of the play. In the final section, I will proceed beyond the text to briefly explore how the textual imaginations spread through literary comments and exchanges, printing, and also possibly performances on the stage to reach different audiences.



Figure 1. Anonymous, illustrations of *Three Visits to the Haven of Peach Blossoms*. XXSKQS, p225.

## 2.1 A DIACHRONIC DIALOGUE: GENERIC ADAPTATIONS OF CUI HU'S POEM IN THE POST-TANG PERIODS

The imagination of the poem started from Meng Qi's accounts in *Benshi shi*: After Cui Hu returned to the village again, he met an old man at the gate, who told him how his daughter, the

very girl that Cui Hu had met before, had died tragically of grief after she saw the poem on the wall. Overwhelmed with guilt and sadness, Hu went into the village and mourned for the girl, after which the girl miraculously came back to life.<sup>26</sup>

Historically, this composition showed the typical influence of the Tang *chuanqi* 傳奇 tale; but afterwards, despite the variation in styles, all adaptations of Cui Hu's romance followed Meng's basic framework and formulated a linear structure of "meeting - departure - return - writing - reading - death - resurrection," even though the implicit language of the poem never suggested such a structure. Would we imagine a tragic story behind the poem without knowing the *Benshi shi* version where the death and resurrection happened? Would we feel less passionate for the romance without reading the intense narratives, since the emotions expressed in the poem itself are actually implicit, warm, "sad but not miserable" 樂而不傷? Yes and no. Given that this particular poem had never travelled alone, it has in fact, always and only been understood with the aid of diverse narratives and generic discourses, and these surrounding texts formed a field of imagination where the original poem was repeatedly retold, interpreted and remembered.

As revealed in Meng's version, the poem serves as a communicative medium for romantic emotions,<sup>27</sup> and the narratives, despite their highly imaginative characteristics, aim to heighten the emotion with intensity. Quite different from Meng's original purpose to create an emotionally powerful story, the Song dynasty scholar Ji Yougong 計有功 (1121-1161) perceived

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<sup>26</sup> Rephrased from the story in Meng Qi's *Benshi shi*, p20-1.

<sup>27</sup> As one of the typical *tibi shi* 題壁詩 (*poems inscribed on walls*) in the Tang Dynasty, Cui Hu's poem also points to a larger concern about the social function of its contemporary poetry in the process of circulation and communication. This is not the major issue this paper addresses, but the related works on poetic circulation and communication in the Tang period as well as on *tibi shi* have helped me think about Cui Hu's poems in the case of *Benshi shi* and later adaptations. Christopher Nugent discussed the poetic production and circulation in the Tang Dynasty from such perspectives as textual memory, orality, collecting and inscribing in his comprehensive research of *Manifest in Words, Written on Paper: Producing and Circulating Poetry in Tang Dynasty China*, in Harvard-Yenching Institute Monograph Series 70, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010. From the perspective of materiality, Judith Zeitlin examined *tibi shi* across periods as a cultural product in her article "Disappearing Verses: Writing on Walls and Anxieties of Loss," *Writing and Materiality in China: Essays in Honor of Patrick Hanan*, ed. Judith T. Zeitlin and Lydia H. Liu with Ellen Widmer, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003.

the romance as historically accurate and reliable biographical information about Cui Hu. In the *Tangshi jishi* 唐詩紀事 (*Recording the Events of Tang Poems*), he organized the entry on “Cui Hu” into three sections -- first the original poem, next the romance recorded in *Benshi shi*, and finally, a brief biography of Cui Hu.<sup>28</sup> The highly imaginary and literary descriptions of Cui Hu’s solitary personality 孤潔寡合<sup>29</sup> and the resurrection of the girl in the *Benshi shi* are removed in *Tangshi jishi*; while the veracity of Cui Hu as the author of the poem and the romantic story as the actual background of poetic composition gained emphasis. In this case, the poem does not only serve as a message and implication for romantic emotions, but rather, provides an evidence to justify the contexts of the narrative.

Ji Yougong’s adaptation reflects a contradictory take on the word “*benshi*” compared with that of Meng Qi. In fact, the notion of “*benshi*” has never remained consistent. Across periods, scholars and literati imposed diverse definitions on *Benshi shi* with different classifications. Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007-1072), the Song official and editor of *Xin Tangshu* 新唐書 (*New Tang History*) categorized *Benshi shi* into the “*zongji*” 總集 (general collection) of poetry;<sup>30</sup> Song bibliophiles Chao Gongwu 晁公武 (1105-1180) and Chen Zhensun 陳振孫 (fl. 1211-1249) put the anthology respectively into the categories of *zongji*<sup>31</sup> and *wenshi* 文史 (history and literature),<sup>32</sup> both of which were subordinate to the *ji* category 集部, along with different forms of literature; the Ming scholar Hu Yinglin 胡應麟 (1551–1602) placed *Benshi*

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<sup>28</sup> Ji Yougong 計有功, *Tangshi jishi* 唐詩紀事, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965, p619-620. Ji also concluded this entry with a short biography of Cui Hu, saying that “Hu, style name Yingong, earned jinshi degree in the twelfth year of the Zhenyuan Reign, and held a position of Jiedu shi in Lingnan throughout his life,” 護, 字殷功, 貞元十二年登第, 終嶺南節度使 which transformed his composition properly into the format of historical writing.

<sup>29</sup> Meng Qi, *Benshi shi*, p19.

<sup>30</sup> Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 et al. ed, *Xin Tangshu* 新唐書, *juan* 60.

<sup>31</sup> Chao Gongwu 晁公武, *Junzhai dushu zhi* 郡齋讀書志, *juan* 20, Changsha: Wangshi, 1895, p.4a.

<sup>32</sup> Chen Zhensun 陳振孫, *Zhizhai shulu jieti* 直齋書錄解題, Taipei: Taibei shangwu yinshu guan, 1968, p615.

*shi* into the category of *xiaoshuo* 小說 (less important anecdotes),<sup>33</sup> and finally, the largest book catalogue in the Qing dynasty, the *Siku quanshu zongmu* 四庫全書總目 (*Comprehensive Catalogue of the Complete Library in Four Sections*) listed *Benshi shi* under the group of *shiwén píng* 詩文評 (criticism of poetry and prose).<sup>34</sup> Outside of these classifications, there were also scholars who imitated the generic feature of “*benshi shi*” to compile sequels for it,<sup>35</sup> and who applied this genre to anthologize other works such as lyrics.<sup>36</sup>

Modern scholar Luo Genze 羅根澤 (1900 – 1960) even claimed that *Benshi shi* was the predecessor of the genre of “*shihua*” 詩話 (remarks on poetry) that originated in the Song Dynasty.<sup>37</sup> From the above discussions, we see that the notion of “*benshi*” had been widely contested in later dynasties; although poems usually stayed as stable messages, their relations to story narratives never remained the same.

Since the Song Dynasty, the boom of commerce, trade and public entertainment<sup>38</sup> prompted the appearance of different forms of performing genres such as *ci* 詞 (lyrics), *huaben* 話本 and *zhugong diao* 諸宮調. New forms of popular narrative provided a variety of ways to express and explain the meaning of the poems, and also brought poetry to the stage of performances. In this period, Cui Hu’s story was adapted into the *zaju* versions of “Cui Hu

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<sup>33</sup> Hu Yinglin 胡應麟, *Shaoshi shanfang bicong* 少室山房筆叢, Taipei Shi : Shi jie shu ju, 1963. Laura Hua Wu discussed Hu Yingling’s notion of *xiaoshuo* in her article “From Xiaoshuo to Fiction: Hu Yinglin’s Genre Study of Xiaoshuo,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol. 55, No. 2 (Dec., 1995), pp. 339-71.

<sup>34</sup> Ji Yun 紀昀 et al ed., *Siku quanshu zongmu* 四庫全書總目: 200 juan, Taipei: Yi wen yin shu guan, 1965.

<sup>35</sup> Nie Fengxian 聶奉先, *Xu Benshi shi* 續本事詩 (*Sequel to Benshi shi*), in the series of Tangsong congshu 唐宋叢書, baizhong congshu jicheng 百種叢書集成, zhi 20, Taipei : yiwén, 1965. Xu Qiu 徐鉉 in the Qing dynasty also edited a book titled *Benshi shi*, and the book was included in the *Qing shihua fangyi chubian* 清詩話仿軼初編 (*First Compilation of the Lost Works of Qing Poetry Remarks*), eds., Du Songbai 杜松柏, Taipei: Xin wenfeng chuban gongsi, 1987.

<sup>36</sup> In the field of lyrics, Zhang Zongsu 張宗橐 (1705-1775) compiled *Cilin jishi* 詞林紀事, gathering lyrics with their contexts and stories from a wide range of miscellaneous jottings, and anthologizing them within the convention of commentary.

<sup>37</sup> Luo Genze 羅根澤, *Zhongguo wenxue piping shi* 中國文學批評史 (*Critical History of Chinese Literature*), Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1958, vol. 2, p244 and vol. 3, p220-1.

<sup>38</sup> Dieter Kuhn, *The Age of Confucian Rule: The Song Transformation of China*, Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009, pp.203-4, 268-9.

Liuyao” 崔护六么 and “Cui Hu Xiaoyaole” 崔护逍遥乐; the *zhugongdiao* 諸宮調 songs of “Cui Hu asking for water” 崔护谒漿; the *huaben* 話本 story of “Cui Hu seeking water” 崔护觅水; and so forth.<sup>39</sup> None of these works survived; however the titles recorded in later anthologies and classified reference books 類書 demonstrate the public performances of Cui Hu’s story as well a large readership of it.

There were also some fictional adaptations in Ming-Qing period, among which the most well-known was a *ruhua* 入話 (introductory remarks) version in Feng Menglong’s 馮夢龍 (1574 - 1646) “Wu Qing Meets Aiai by the Golden Bright Pond” 金明池吳清逢愛愛.<sup>40</sup> This *ruhua* version transcribed most of the accounts in *Benshi shi*, but focused not on telling a simple romantic story, but on the power of “fate” 緣. In contrast to Cui Hu who luckily reunited with the girl through a poem, the female protagonist Aiai 愛愛 in Feng’s story was not blessed by “fate” to reunite with her beloved. At the very end of the story, she sacrificed herself to Wu Qing 吳清 and used a magic pill to find her beloved a decent wife, a girl sharing the same first name with her, and whom Wu Qing had in fact come across in the street many years before.<sup>41</sup> The power of fate became the link between the *ruhua* and the major story; and Cui Hu’s mural poem, which contextualized and legitimized his predestined fate with the girl, was thus further connected with other stories in Ming popular culture. This dialogue between the poem and popular narratives then culminated in the Ming drama version of Cui Hu’s romance. As we will see in the next section, the poem in Meng Chengshun’s play was developed in a sophisticated way in terms of story design and delicate dramatic language, and as a result, it was interwoven into a romantic

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<sup>39</sup> Wu Ping 吳平 and Hui Daqiang 回達強 ed., *Lidai xiqu mulu congkan* 歷代戲曲目錄叢刊, Yangzhou: Guangling shushe, 2009.

<sup>40</sup> Feng Menglong 馮夢龍, *Stories to Caution the World* 警世通言, trans by Shuhui Yang 楊曙輝 and Yunqin Yang 楊韻琴, Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 2009, p1436.

<sup>41</sup> Summarized according to the story in Feng Menglong’s *Jingshi tongyan*.

discourse together with famous popular plays such as the *Xixiang ji* 西廂記 (*Story of the Western Wing*) and *Mudan ting* 牡丹亭 (*Peony Pavilion*).

## 2.2 A SYNCHRONIC DIALOGUE WITHIN AND OUTSIDE OF THE PLAY

Meng Chengshun (style name Ziruo 子若) was a playwright and publisher living in the Ming-Qing transition period.<sup>42</sup> He was the author of several northern and southern plays, and the editor of the two-volume drama anthology *Famous Plays Old and New* 古今名劇合選. *The Three Visits to the Haven of Peach Blossoms* was a northern play of five scenes written by Meng Chengshun that retold the romantic story between Cui Hu and the female protagonist who went by the name of Ye Zhen Er. Meng anthologized this play in the first volume of his compilation -- *liuzhi ji* 柳枝集 (*Anthology of Willows*) -- with other twenty-six plays of the Yuan and Ming dynasties, including two composed by himself.

The version I will examine in this paper is the one printed in the Chongzhen 崇禎 reign.<sup>43</sup> It contained a set of illustrations arranged at the beginning of the book that summarized each story with pictorial narratives-- usually two illustrations for each play on every page; within the text of *Three Visits* there were Chen Hongshou's 陳洪綬 (1599 - 1652) commentaries on top of the columns written in a smaller type in double lines. As we will see in the following discussions, the illustrations, the play texts and Chen's commentaries constituted a combined venue of poetic

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<sup>42</sup> For a detailed biography of Meng Chengshun, refer to Xu Shuofang 徐朔方, *Wan Ming qujia nianpu* 晚明曲家年譜, vol.2, pp. 539-72.

<sup>43</sup> Meng Chengshun 孟稱舜, *The Three Visits to the Haven of Peach Blossoms* 桃源三訪, *Famous Plays Old and New, Anthology of Willow* 古今名劇合選柳枝集, in the *Sequel to the Complete Library in Four Sections* 續修四庫全書 (XXSKQS)1763 (Ji Section 集部, Category of Drama 戲劇類), Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, pp. 544-58.

imagination, where they echoed and shaped each other as subtexts for the poem, so that the implicit information and emotions in the original poem were to its utmost attended and extended from different perspectives and into different directions.

The first time we see Cui Hu's original poem in *the Anthology of Willows* is in a pictorial presentation of the story. To visualize the opening line of the play,<sup>44</sup> the picture showed a young scholar inscribing on an outer wall that was shaded by clusters of peach flowers, a little child attending him with brush strokes and ink (Figure 1). However, the poem was symbolically embodied with sinuous lines, rather than presented in exact characters; in this case the content of the poem was perfectly concealed within the lines. This picture offered an initial understanding - or to be more accurate, the first imagination -- of the poem in its original context. That single frame of time and space shaped by this picture implied a narrative -- who was that inscriber? Why was he writing on the wall? What happened after that? As we read along in the play, the significance of the poem in shaping and prompting the plots gradually unfolded and revealed itself to us.

We see the full text of the poem at the end of the third Scene 折: After having waited in vain for a while, the child attendant started to urge Cui Hu to leave for home; in this situation, Cui Hu decided to inscribe a poem on the wall.<sup>45</sup> However, the appearance of the poem was postponed. Prior to the actual presentation of the poem, its whole meaning was translated into a song in the tune of "Seven Brothers" 七弟兄,

“It was just like this misty and dark day, around the flowers; but I cannot see the shining face that I expected. The only thing that has not changed is the familiar

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<sup>44</sup> “Inscribing under the grieving flowers is the sad scholar Cui” 題紅怨傷心崔氏, XXSKQS, p544.

<sup>45</sup> XXSKQS, p552.

brilliance of the peach blossoms -- they are still smiling in the spring breeze, and blooming in an empty courtyard.”

似這禁煙，暮天，遶花邊，幾回兒盼不見那如花面。單則見桃花不改舊時妍，笑春風，開向空庭院。<sup>46</sup>

Right after the original poem was presented in speech at the end of the third scene, Meng employed some other arias to reinforce the regretful emotions in Cui Hu’s heart.<sup>47</sup> Although the poem was physically only 28 characters long, the central position of the poem in the play and its poetic meaning were established and developed with the help of the narratives -- those of pictures, songs, and the structural design of the play.

Following the poem, the fourth scene opened with the return of Zhen Er to the village. In this scene, the poem was perceived from Zhen Er’s perspective. Though left unsaid in the original poem, Zhen Er’s reading of and response to the poem gained detailed elaborations in the *Three Visits*. The poem was once again symbolized in Zhen Er’s reactions after the reading: in a highly dramatic plot element presented in speech, Meng portrayed her complex emotions of longing, excitement, regret and desperation at the reading of Cui Hu’s inscriptions. After reading the poem, she was so excited about Hu’s return that she then became so overwhelmed after realizing that Hu had actually left again. In another second, Zhen Er mistook her father for Cui Hu, right after which she sighed heavily for her “ill-fated life” 命薄.<sup>48</sup> It was from this plot moment that the play went beyond the actual content of the poem and imagined an emotional story from Zhen Er’s perspective. It was also the reading process that Zhen Er had gone through that highlighted the significance of the poem in the play. As one of the two singing voices of the play, it is from this turning point that Zhen Er’s voice became the major point of reference for

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Summarized from the Scene 4, XXSKQS, p553.

the play, and Zhen Er's role as the protagonist of the play was emphasized, especially compared with previous adaptations.<sup>49</sup> This is a character that was produced completely out of the imagination, but one that revealed a lot about Meng's interpretation of the original poem.

Another essential example of Meng's imaginative response to the play was the implicit relationship between Zhen Er and the peach blossoms in the play. As far as I can tell, Meng developed this relationship in a very romantic and exquisite way, full of emblems and echoes. This relationship was first and foremost implied and concluded by the name Ye Zhen Er 叶蓁儿. Taken from the lines "Buxom is the peach-tree;/ How thick its leaves!/  
Our lady going home/  
Brings good to the people of her house"<sup>50</sup> 桃之夭夭, /其葉蓁蓁; /之子於歸, /宜其家人 in the poem "Peach Tree" 桃夭 in *Shijing* 詩經 (*Classic of Poetry*), the name Ye Zhen Er aestheticized the world of a girl "dreaming about the spring" 怀春之女 and looking forward to marriage, which also suggested her romantic happy ending with Cui Hu. Meng created a unity of Zhen Er and the peach blossoms, regardless of the contrasting relationship suggested in the original poem.

Besides the point of naming, we can also detect their close relationship from the scenes where characters interacted with peach blossoms. Situating all the scenes in the season of spring and all the occasions in the remote village, Meng purposely accompanied every single performance of characters with symbols of flowers. The function of these flowers ranged from serving as a catalyst for emotional expressions to calling up the recollections from the past. Especially in the final scene, the interactions between the flowers, Zhen Er, Cui Hu and their implicit emotions were further woven into almost all the songs and speeches. Zhen Er's personal

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<sup>49</sup> Compared with Yuan *zaju* that used single singing voice and Ming *chuanqi* play that employed two singing voices, in Ming *zaju* there could be one or two singing voices. Meng Chengshun chose to use both Cui Hu and Ye Zhen'er as singing voices, demonstrating his purpose to create a balanced storytelling from two perspectives.

<sup>50</sup> Arthur Waley trans. *The Book of Songs (Shijing)*, New York: Grove Press, 1996, pp. 8-9.

reflection on her intimacy with the flowers presented in the final scene also further transcended the boundaries between the two and formulated a unity where each spoke for the other.

To the tune of “Flowers Fill the Court” 滿庭芳,<sup>51</sup> Zhen Er realized a pitiful similarity between the two -- though once “jealous of each other” 您道是，桃花人面兩相妬, they were now sharing the same failure in their romantic dreams -- flowers forced to leave the boughs when the season was over and she herself declining in health after Cui Hu was gone. “The conscious and the unconscious” 有情人，無情物<sup>52</sup> here in Zhen Er’s arias changed the relationship between the two in the original poem, where they were not interacting within one unity but simply in contrast to each other.

A more interesting aspect of the final scene, however, lay in the highly delicate descriptions of Zhen Er’s ailment, death and resurrection. Extending from the poetic dialogues that we have found within the text, now we can also discuss the dialogues happening outside of the text using this process as a wonderful example.

Chen Hongshou’s commentaries on the play gave us hints of a world of dramatic exchanges and dialogues. More than twice in his commentaries, especially those comments about the second half of the play, Chen Hongshou evaluated Meng’s play in comparison with *The Story of the Western Wing* and *Peony Pavilion*. In this situation, the *Three Visits* was in fact not evaluated independently on its own standing, but rather, aesthetically judged in relation to other works, mostly those considered superior and in fact famous, whether of the contemporary or previous periods. Chen compared the *Three Visits* and the two classics in terms of the plot designation and the language of death. If we further examine the strong resemblance in these two

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<sup>51</sup> XXSKQS, pp. 555.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

aspects, we would be convinced of this shared practice of drama writing, and of how this common discourse participated in shaping a specific mode of poetic imagination.

“From the second scene to this scene are all about imaginary emotions and thoughts; scenes and feelings are full of extreme sadness with a combination of lonely tears. Since the moment (Zhen Er) read the poem until the final Scene, there are tears and pains for real, thousands of deaths and resurrections -- all of them clearly in front of my eyes. It overpowers the whole *Peony Pavilion*!”

“自二折到此折前數枝皆是虛想，情景悲楚，進入幽淚。見詩后至末折，真啼真痛，千死千生，確然在目，直壓倒一部牡丹亭矣。”<sup>53</sup>

This commentary appeared at the start of the fourth Scene and was a general evaluation of the later two scenes where Zhen Er experienced her fatal sickness and miraculous resurrection. Setting the play *Peony Pavilion* as the bar, the intensity of emotions (*qing*) and appeal of the drama's language in the *Three Visits* were underlined. As we can see from a large number of commentaries of the *Peony Pavilion*<sup>54</sup> and miscellaneous jottings that recorded the reading practices of this play in Ming and Qing societies, the “dramatization of love”<sup>55</sup> impressed many avid readers of the play; and many scenes of the play, where Du Liniang 杜麗娘 died and lived for a love only visualized and promised in dreams, became the most typical and famous footnote of romantic obsession in the Ming-Qing period.<sup>56</sup> Similarly, in the *Three Visits*, Meng also

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p552.

<sup>54</sup> One example for this can be the commentaries on the *Peony Pavilion* written by the three wives of Wu Wushan 吳吳山. Chen Tong 陳同, Tan Ze 談則 and Qian Yi 錢宜, *Wu Wushan sanfu heping mudan ting huanhunji* 吳吳山三婦合評牡丹亭還魂記, Beijing: Xueyuan chubanshe, 2003.

<sup>55</sup> Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994, pp71.

<sup>56</sup> “Dream” was a significant theme in Tang Xianzu's 汤显祖 (1550 – 1616) plays. Besides *Peony Pavilion*, Tang had another three “dream plays,” which were *Nanke ji* 南柯記 (*The Record of Southern Bough*), *Handan ji* 邯鄲記 (*The Record of Handan*), and *Zichai ji* 紫釵記 (*The Record of the Purple Hairpin*). Wai-ye Li and Tina Lu analyzed the dream and love in *Peony Pavilion* and also in the late Ming and early Qing periods. Wai-ye Li, Chapter 2, “The Late-Ming Moment,” *Enchantment and Disenchantment: Love and Illusion in Chinese Literature*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993, pp. 47 - 88. Tina Lu, “The Lover's Dream,” *Persons, Roles, and Minds: Identity in Peony Pavilion and Peach Blossom Fan*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001, pp.63-96. Other scholarship I referred to regarding the issue of obsession with *qing* in the Ming-Qing period

contextualized Zhen Er's obsession of *qing* with a plot where she dreamed about a happy reunion with Cui Hu during her serious ailment.<sup>57</sup>

The other play that Chen used as a standard to judge the *Three Visits* was *The Story of the Western Wing*. He pointed us to the resemblance between the role of Cui Hu's mural poem and the plot of verse exchange in *The Story of the Western Wing*.<sup>58</sup> The occasion of citing poems in *The Story of the Western Wing* appeared in the third Scene of the first Book 本, where the scholar Zhang 張生 tried Yingying's 鶯鶯 emotions by chanting a poem at the corner of the wall, to which Yingying responded immediately with an elegant composition.<sup>59</sup> By doing so, they both got an implicit but clear sense of the other's affection. This technique of employing poetry as an indicator of romantic feelings further revealed the existence of a dialogic environment in dramatic creation. One piece of evidence that could even better exemplify this practice of sharing appeared at the end of the verse exchange scene in *The Story of the Western Wing*:

“The happiness of that day has now been fixed: A single poem is clear evidence. Never again will I seek in dreams the blue palace gates, but only wait beneath the peach flower tree.”<sup>60</sup>

“我一天好事今宵定，兩首詩分明互證。再不要青瑣闌夢兒中尋，只索去碧桃花樹下等。”

It struck me as interesting how “seek[ing] it in dreams” and “wait[ing] beneath the peach flower tree” implicitly referred to episodes in the *Peony Pavilion* and to Cui Hu's romantic

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includes Kang-I Sun Chang, “The Concept of Ch'ing and Late-Ming Images of Women,” *The Late-Ming Poet Ch'en Tzu-Lung: Crises of Love and Loyalism*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991, pp. 9-18.

<sup>57</sup> XXSKQS, p554.

<sup>58</sup> Chen's comments saying: Before [these arias] they were all imaginary words; at this point everything has been certified.

Compared with the scene of verse exchange in *The Story of the Western Wing*, the grief [in this aria] is indeed so heavy. 前都是虛想之詞，到此步步踏實，較西廂聯詩折，情確而悲矣。XXSKQS, 553.

<sup>59</sup> Wang Shifu 王實甫, *The Moon and the Zither: The Story of the Western Wing*, edited and translated by Stephen H. West and Wilt L. Idema, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991, p206.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p209.

encounters. Of course we should always be careful to claim this reference with absolute certainty, but from it we can still reaffirm the dialogic culture in late Ming dramatic productions.

Until now, we have seen the textual evolution of Cui Hu's romance from the late Tang to Ming Dynasty. Of all the adaptations across periods, Meng Chengshun's play marked the highest complexity in terms of multiple perspectives of narrative, details in plot elements and symbolized languages, but the basic framework of the story remained the same with the original in *Benshi shi*, which at the end was embodied by the phrase "renmian taohua."

### 2.3 A SOCIAL DIALOGUE: LITERARY EXCHANGES, PRINTING, PERFORMANCES AND THE ISSUE OF AUDIENCES

As we have already seen, Meng Chengshun was not making his dramatic journey alone. Besides Chen Hongshou who usually made commentaries and illustrations<sup>61</sup> for his close friend, literati such as Ma Quanqi 馬權奇 (*jinsi* 進士 1643) and Qi Biaoqia 祁彪佳 (1602 – 1645), together with a small community of literary scholars, painting artists and wealthy connoisseurs, facilitated the exchange and publication of Meng's plays, and thus helped him earn his authoritative position in the drama industry.<sup>62</sup> These people were the initial readers of Meng's play. And through their participation in printing and publishing, Meng's play earned the chance to be circulated and received among a wider public. From circulation in a small circle of friends to that in a larger public is a process of expansion from manuscript culture to print culture. And in this

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<sup>61</sup> Chen illustrated Meng's first long play *Jiao Hong Ji* 嬌紅記 (*Mistress and Maid*).

<sup>62</sup> Katherine Carlitz, "Passion and Chastity: Meng Chengshun and the Fall of the Ming," *Text, Performance, and Gender in Chinese Literature and Music: Essays in Honor of Wilt Idema*, Sinica Leidensia, volume 92, edited by Michel Hockx, Maghiel van Crevel and Tian Yuan Tan, Leiden: Brill, 2008, pp. 193 - 210.

process, issues of edition and audience were the most important to study the popularization of Cui Hu's poem.

A study conducted by Katherine Carlitz examined the relationship between printing and performance in Ming society.<sup>63</sup> Despite the performance-oriented nature of drama,<sup>64</sup> many playwrights, particularly the literati playwrights, wanted their works to be read, and therefore, to be remembered accurately on the page. The boom of printing enabled them to publish refined editions of their works, anthologize the comments on their plays and guide the public to appreciate their writings. Considering the production of *Three Visits* we just examined, Meng and his fellow friends seemed to have followed this pattern of practice; so the *Three Visits* we read today, is not a typical performance text, but more of a “literary work.”

Though the boundary between a “literature-oriented” and “performance-oriented” play is hard to make clear, the two extant versions of Meng's work may shed light into the question. In the Ming Dynasty, there existed another *zaju* version of Cui Hu's romance titled *Taohua renmian* 桃花人面 (*Peach Blossoms and Beauties*), which was also attributed to Meng Chengshun. This play was included in the collection of *Shengming zaju* 盛明雜劇 (*Zaju Plays of the Flourishing Ming*) edited and published by Shen Tai 沈泰 around 1630.<sup>65</sup> *Shengming zaju* anthologized 60 *zaju* play of the Ming Dynasty, each with comments and annotations from literati or Shen himself.

A careful examination and comparison of the two plays reveals how different they were. Even though the story framework was more or less the same, the version in Shen Tai's

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<sup>63</sup> Katherine Carlitz, “Printing as Performance: Literati Playwright-Publishers of the Late Ming,” Cynthia J. Brokaw and Kai-wing Chow ed., *Printing and book culture in late Imperial China*, Berkeley : University of California Press, 2005, pp. 267 - 303.

<sup>64</sup> In his own preface of the *Famous Plays Old and New*, Meng claimed “proper to be performed on the stage” 可演之臺上 as one of the considerations for selecting the plays. XXSKQS, p211.

<sup>65</sup> Meng Chengshun, *Taohua renmian* 桃花人面, in Shen Tai 沈泰 eds., *Shengming zaju* 盛明雜劇, vol. 3, Beijing: Guji chubanshe, 1958.

compilation was much shorter and more simplified in contents; and also, almost all of the arias were different from those in Meng's self-selected version, in spite of the similar tunes. Many scholars have noticed the differences between the two versions and have argued over their authorship and editorship, as well as their original purposes for creation.<sup>66</sup> There is a consensus that the two were not separate editions of one single play but two different plays, and that the version in Meng's *Famous Plays* probably possessed a higher quality and reliability. Chen's first few comments in the *Three Visits*, suggesting that the version anthologized in the *Famous Plays* "was polished by Meng himself, thus more refined than previous versions" 此本出子塞手自改, 較視前本更為精當 have also demonstrated the superiority and authenticity of this version compared with the others.<sup>67</sup>

However, the variations might from one side highlight the influence of drama printing in Ming society. With the onset of mass printing, not one single version could dominate the whole book market, and no cultural artifacts could justify themselves without dialoguing with others. The two circulating versions of Meng's play may also illustrate the process of a literary work being turned into a popular cultural product through Ming-Qing commercial and social network.

Evidence is not adequate to show that the version in *Shengming zaju* was rewritten for the sake of public performance. This is also true when attempting to locate the exact audience for the two plays, except for Meng's commentators, illustrators and literati friends. But some scholars have conducted research on the "audience" of Ming-Qing popular literature with different cases.

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<sup>66</sup> Here I referred to some articles published in China on Ming-Qing dramatic adaptations of Cui Hu's romance. In summary, most of their discussions focus on issues such as the aesthetic achievements of Meng's drama, technical terms in drama performances and analyses of tunes and lyrics. Some selected articles: 1) Pan Qian 潘倩, "Problem of Edition of *Taohua renmian* and *Taoyuan sanfang*" 桃花人面和桃源三訪版本研究, *Northern Literature*, 2011 (2); 2) Zhou Yongzhong 周永忠, "A Comparison on the Style of Languages in *Taohua renmian* and *Taoyuan sanfang*" 桃花人面與桃源三訪語言風格比較, *Journal of Wuzhou Teachers College of Guangxi*, 2006 (3); 3) Peng Yin 彭茵, "Meng Chengshun's Theory of Emotion Expression and His Dramatic Creation" 孟稱舜傳情理論及其戲曲創作, *Journal of Literature and History*, 1999 (3).

<sup>67</sup> XXSKQS, p544.

An overview of the literature regarding the issue may illustrate the complexity and plurality of the issue of audience.

Two approaches usually employed in this investigation are textual analysis and historical examination. A study of the thematic and linguistic characteristics of the vernaculars, such as the level of vocabulary and aesthetic qualities of arias and speeches, can demonstrate certain possible groups of the audience.<sup>68</sup> In some regions, local music drama served as “ritual ornamentations” for festive and religious celebrations and enjoyed popularity among villagers and poor peasants.<sup>69</sup> Investigation into education, literacy, and the book market could also identify the stratification of audience for Ming-Qing popular literature.<sup>70</sup> These case studies reveal that the issue of “audience” for popular literature is positioned in a complex web of writing and reading. Writers targeted a certain type of audience and wrote for different purposes, while the readership in a wide range selected certain texts for their own use. In this situation, the act of *reading* created new versions of texts, and thus shaped an “audience-oriented” popular culture. Embedded within the popular texts, poems therefore went through the same process of selection and popularization, thus possibly influencing the public perception of what poetry meant.

A more comprehensive discussion of the issue of poetic perception certainly demands more sources and evidence. However, with this case study we could reach a preliminary conclusion about how poetry-story interaction could generate a dialogic context, and how the *dialogue* could form a shared knowledge and discourse in the process of social exchanges,

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<sup>68</sup> Robert Hegel, “Distinguishing Levels of Audiences for Ming-Ch’ing Vernacular Literature: A Case Study,” David Johnson, Andrew J. Nathan and Evelyn S. Rawski ed., *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985, p112-42.

<sup>69</sup> Tanaka Issei, “The Social and Historical Context of Ming-Ch’ing Local Drama,” *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*, pp. 143 - 60.

<sup>70</sup> Evelyn Rawski, Chapter 5 and 6, *Education and Popular Literacy in Ch’ing China*, in the series of Michigan Studies on China, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1979, pp.109-39.

printing, and public performances. In the following chapter, I will further examine the “shared knowledge and discourse” of “renmian taohua,” with the extension of its meaning and application in Ming-Qing and modern periods.

### 3.0 DISCOURSE OF “RENMIAN TAOHUA” AND ITS MODERN APPROPRIATION

This chapter will be devoted to the formation of “renmian taohua” as a multi-textual discourse and its expansion and application in the modern periods. Two cases I will focus on to illustrate the modern use of the phrase are Ouyang Yuqian’s 歐陽予倩 1920 Peking opera *Renmian taohua* 人面桃花 and Ge Fei’s 格非 contemporary novel *Renmian taohua* 人面桃花, published in 2010. I argue that “renmian taohua” in the modern periods experienced a process of transformation, from a discourse of the “beauty-scholar” romance in the Ming-Qing period, into one about women. In the following sections, I will briefly introduce the evolution of “renmian taohua,” and provide my analysis of Ouyang Yuqian’s and Ge Fei’s works, both demonstrating the vitality of Cui Hu’s story and the influences of the trope of “renmian taohua.”

#### 3.1 EVOLUTION OF “RENMIAN TAOHUA”

The trope of “renmian taohua” did not originate in Cui Hu’s poem and the story anthologized in *Benshi shi*. Rather, it could at least be traced back to the Southern Dynasties, when Yu Xin 庾信 (513-581) built up the close relationship between beauty and peach flowers in his work “Chun Fu” 春賦 (*Fu* of Springs). When describing groups of court ladies traveled together in the spring,

Yu Xin used the sentence “beautiful faces compete with peach flowers” 面共桃而競紅 to emphasize on the beauty and delicacy of those women, which also created a poetic sphere where human and nature formed a perfect unification. Cui Hu’s poem expanded the relationship between beauty and peach flowers by contrasting the two imageries: the long-lasting nature of peach flowers highlighted the transience of human beauty. After Cui Hu’s poem was developed into a romantic story in *Benshi shi* and various later versions, “renmian taohua” was imbued with certain social meaning; particularly in the Ming-Qing period, due to its association with popular romantic plays and fiction that consisted of a “culture of romance,” “renmian taohua” was conventionalized as a reference for the typical beauty-scholar romance.

However, it is interesting to point out that after the appearance of Cui Hu’s poem in *Benshi shi*, the trope of “renmian taohua” was not often used in literati poems and lyrics. A study suggested that only 4 Song lyrics once employed it in the compositions.<sup>71</sup> Also, since both the imageries of “renmian” (beauty) and “taohua” (peach blossoms) had a long history in Chinese literary texts, the phrase is sometimes employed in terms of a variety of cultural implications and suggestions. For instance, the use of peach blossoms as a symbol for isolation and peace came from Tao Yuanming’s 陶淵明 famous work “Taohua yuan ji” 桃花源記 (Record of the Peach Blossoms Haven), where the place filled with splendid peach flowers provided a shelter for common people from the chaotic time of the Eastern Jin Dynasty (317-420). The “renmian,” on the contrary, was usually used to refer to women, though it could suggest different female images in different occasions and contexts. In the modern period, there were also various adaptations and applications of the phrase and the story, and some of them used the phrase

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<sup>71</sup> Chen Wenjie 陳文杰, “Cihua kaijin geng wu hua: lun Ge Fei *Renmian taohua* de wenhua shendu” 此花開盡更無花：論格非《人面桃花》的文化深度, *Journal of Guangdong AIB Polytechnic College*, Vol. 22, No.1: March 2006.

independently from the context of the poem and Cui Hu's story, though the phrase itself had been shaped as a romantic discourse.<sup>72</sup>

The above analysis demonstrated that “renmian taohua” was a cultural reference that possessed a large space of imagination. Since the Ming-Qing period when Cui Hu's poem and romance were significantly popularized along with fiction and drama, “renmian taohua” typified a language that revolves around women, romance and the melancholy of loss. In spite of a discourse of “scholar-beauty” romance in the Ming-Qing period, “renmian taohua” evolved with different forms of modern adaptations, in which the voice of woman was increasingly highlighted, transforming “renmian taohua” into a feminist discourse.

### **3.2 “RENMIAN TAOHUA” AS A ROMANTIC DISCOURSE: WOMEN IN MALE FANTASY**

“Renmian taohua” as a romantic discourse shaped by Cui Hu's story in *Benshi shi* and later adaptations of it reflected romance and women under the male fantasy. In this patterned romance between scholars and beauties, poetic talent and beautiful appearance were placed as a pair of counterparts. However, female beauty in the “scholar-beauty romance” was placed under the male talent; in the case of Cui Hu, the girl was attracted to and died from Cui Hu's mural poem while her resurrection also relied on Cui Hu's return. Although Cui Hu failed in the civil service exam, the mural poem, especially its power over the girl, served as a compensation for the lack

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<sup>72</sup> In the modern periods, the adaptation form varied from the film, singing opera, local drama to novel. Some modern adaptations of Cui Hu's romance and “renmian taohua”: Cantonese drama *Renmian taohua* 人面桃花, Peking opera *Renmian taohua* 人面桃花, Pingju 評劇 *Renmian taohua* 人面桃花, and the film *Renmian taohua* 人面桃花 directed by Chen Shouyin 陳壽蔭 and produced by Xinhua film company, etc.

of acknowledgement of his scholarly talents. This contrast between the scarce official recognition from the civil service examination system and the passionate response from a beautiful girl, demonstrated a strong desire of the literati disappointed by their political careers to be acknowledged and admired. The happy ending of the story, where Cui Hu and the girl united and got married, also added to the conclusion that “renmian taohua” as a romantic discourse represented women in male fantasy, and both the beauty and peach flowers were submitted to a privileged poetic talent, a male gaze.

In modern periods, “renmian taohua” was appropriated in different ways. Some adaptations were based on the traditional story of Cui Hu, while some others completely separated themselves from the original context and offered the trope new implications. But, as we will see in the following analysis, the modern twists were established upon the classical suggestions of this phrase, which had accumulated dialogically through various adaptations and recreation.

### **3.3 A MODERN ROMANCE: OUYANG YUQIAN’S OPERA *RENMIAN TAOHUA***

In 1920, the Peking opera actor and writer Ouyang Yuqian 歐陽予倩 (1889-1962) adapted Cui Hu’s romance into a Peking Opera *Renmian taohua* 人面桃花, which was known as one of the earliest modern appropriations of the trope “renmian taohua.” This play was divided into five acts, following the basic framework of Cui Hu’s story in *Benshi shi* but having added interesting plot elements to fill in some gaps in pervious versions. One typical example was the explanation of the reasons why Cui Hu returned one year after he met the girl in the village, instead of

returning immediately.<sup>73</sup> In the second act, Cui Hu expressed a strong desire to stay in Chang'an and went back to the village, but his friend persuaded him to go back home and wait for the next year of civil service examination.

Like Meng Chengshun added Zhen Er's voice and perspective in his play *Three Visits*, Ouyang Yuqian also elaborated on the female perspective and described Du Yichun's 杜宜春 feelings and desires, both before and after she read Cui Hu's poem. One scene that distinguished Ouyang's play from previous adaptations was Du Yichun's dream. As described in the fourth act, Du Yichun crossed mountains and seas looking for Cui Hu, regardless of the criticism of it from the peach blossom fairy maiden 桃花仙子.<sup>74</sup> In this act, Ouyang Yuqian brought the peach flowers to life and further developed its relationship with Yichun. Instead of serving as the lead to find Cui Hu, as Du Yichun originally wished, the peach blossom maidens urged Yichun to forget about the past, keep being a gentry girl with appropriate behaviors, and embrace the future.<sup>75</sup> However, Yichun listened to her own emotions and believed that "genuine affection would not disappoint her" 我不信真情會遭絕望<sup>76</sup>. In this way, Ouyang Yuqian constructed a female image where Yichun was not a powerless person waiting to be saved by a man whose poetic talents matched her beauty, but an individual of strong agency, who was willing to pursue her happiness with efforts. Even though it was set in a dream, which suggested a contrary reality, the process represented the subjectivity of Yichun, thus transforming a passive voice into a subjective one. First performed in 1925, Ouyang's play still remains the most popular and vital modern version of the story; and the way it constructed the image of Du Yichun has prompted

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<sup>73</sup> Ouyang Yuqian 歐陽予倩, *Renmian taohua* 人面桃花, the second act "Quan gui" 勸歸 (Persuasion on Return), Ouyang Yuqian, Feng Zi 凤子 et al. ed, *Ouyang Yuqian quanji* 欧阳予倩全集, Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chuban she, 1990, pp. 79-84.

<sup>74</sup> *Ouyang Yuqian quanji*, pp. 90-3.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p92.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p93.

the transformation of “renmian taohua” from a “scholar-beauty” romantic discourse to one that situates female roles at the center of the discourse.

### **3.4 A FEMINIST DISCOURSE: GE FEI’S NOVEL *RENMIAN TAOHUA***

The contemporary fictionist Ge Fei stepped even further to structure a new story around “renmian taohua” and changed it into a discourse of women. Published in 2010, the novel depicts the life of a woman called Lu Xiumi 陸秀米, who grew up in a gentry family but later became a revolutionary. Set in the late Qing and early Republican period, the novel presents Xiumi’s unrealistic dream of a utopia and the loss of this illusion. Before being kidnapped on her way to marriage, Xiumi was kept home in isolation from the outside world. She never experienced revolutions herself; all her enlightenments about “revolution” and “progress” came from her mad father and a man named Zhang Jiyuan 張季元, who lived with her family for a while and was then assassinated by the Qing government for participating in radical revolutions. After being brought to an isolated island called Hua’s Cottage 花家舍 (The Flowers Cottage) by a gang of robbers, Xiumi found, to her surprise, that the island very much resembled the “Haven of Peach Blossoms” 桃花源 that her father once dreamed about before going mad. She was fascinated with this isolated, peaceful and beautiful place, and set up her mind to follow the robbers’ leader, a retired official and recluse who built up Hua’s Cottage, and became a revolutionary. After living abroad in Japan for a while, Xiumi came back to her hometown with her son and served as the principal for a new-style school 新式學堂. She united with the gang leaders in Shanghai 上海, hoping to take advantage of their force for revolution until being betrayed by the gang head,

who surrendered to the Qing government at the failure of their revolutionary attempts. Life in jail disillusioned Xiumi from her fantasy about revolution, while also torturing her with feelings of sadness, regrets and emotional pain of losing her son.<sup>77</sup> After being released from jail, she returned home and spent the rest of her life with Xique 喜鹄, the only person in her family that survived the revolutionary time who was once the servant maiden of Xiumi's mother. Xiumi died in her father's attic on a cold winter morning, when she declared that she saw the union of her "past" and "future".<sup>78</sup>

This novel deals with Xiumi's personal history in a chaotic time. The peach blossoms in this novel symbolize the dream of revolution and a utopian fantasy that Xiumi unceasingly pursued throughout her life. Three threads interweaved together to create Xiumi as a desperate revolutionary: her love for the mad father, desire for the mysterious lover and revolutionary, and her encounter with the recluse who built Hua's Cottage and retreated from the outside world. Xiumi's path to revolution started from her consciousness of a "self," and the road also ended at a point where she re-discovered herself, as woman, mother, daughter, friend and family.

In Ge Fei's novel, the imagery of "taohua" (peach blossoms) was given a modern twist as being a beautiful, peaceful, happy and harmonious utopia, which does not exist in the real world. Connecting to the traditional Chinese reference of the "taohua yuan" (Haven of Peach Blossoms) described in Tao Yuanming's work, this contemporary novel situates itself in an established discourse, while also expanding the meaning of the imagery by offering it a modern context and basis of understanding.

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<sup>77</sup> After Xiumi came back to her hometown, she was so obsessed with revolutions that she paid little attention to her son and left the boy to the care of Xique. The boy died in a revolutionary event while Xiumi was away. She was absent at her son's funeral as well.

<sup>78</sup> Ge Fei 格非, *Renmian taohua* 人面桃花, Beijing: Zhongguo gongren chuban she, 2010, p216.

The imagery of “renmian” (beauty), in this case, also underwent a process of appropriation. Ge Fei adopted the romantic suggestion of “renmian” as a beautiful woman and set his narrative around the “sexuality” of Xiumi. Her self-identification as a female revolutionary grows hand in hand with her several romantic encounters in her youth. The two people who enlightened her on the idea of revolution were both people she was once in a romantic or sexual relationship with. Through these contacts, Xiumi thought she had figured out her “own way” by following what the two men dreamed about. Here Ge Fei played on Cui Hu’s romance while also transforming a simple romantic story into one that wove together the self-consciousness and struggles of a modern woman. In this sense, Ge Fei developed the Ming-Qing romantic discourse into a “feminist discourse,” in which an innocent gentry girl grew up as a strong-willed revolutionary -- though failed at the end. Obviously Ge Fei revealed his skepticism for the republican revolutions; but his depiction of the growth of a female revolutionary demonstrated his perception of “renmian taohua” as a discourse that centered women.

Ge Fei’s novel was produced as well as read in a discursive context of “renmian taohua,” whose implications were gradually established by various adaptations of Cui Hu’s story and different literary appropriation of the phrase. I use this case to illustrate that even today, “renmian taohua” still remains lively and widely used as a literary trope, although in many occasions it is independent of Cui Hu’s romantic story.

As we have seen, the formation of “renmian taohua” as a multi-textual discourse experienced a long process of appropriation. The modern discourse of women’s self-identification and utopian dream did not completely break away from the established romantic reference in the Ming-Qing period. Rather, the modern application of the phrase presents a continuous process to extend and expand its cultural implication. Since late Tang Dynasty when

the “beauty - peach blossom” connection was initially established, the on-going adaptation of Cui Hu’s romance and appropriation of the phrase of “renmian taohua” contextualized a site of reference and imagination, in which none could be perceived separately from the others, and all forms of manifestations worked in collaboration with others. I think this process well explains the particularity of poems embedded within stories: in the discursive context where certain story narratives were formed, great changes happened in terms of the circulation and perception patterns of the poem, and as a result, some readers of this type of poetry would pick up a different idea of what poetry was, at least subtly.

## 4.0 CONCLUSION

In the thesis, I proposed the concept of “embedded poems” in stories as a poetic category of investigation, and examined the significance of poetry-story interaction with a case study of Cui Hu’s romance. Using Bakhtin’s theory of “dialogism,” I contextualized the process in which Cui Hu’s original poem and its initial accounts in *Benshi shi* developed into different genres, and how all the generic adaptations of the story collaborated in shaping the complex discourse of “renmian taohua.” As a typical phrase to suggest women, romance, and the melancholy of loss, “renmian taohua” developed its cultural connotations through different generic adaptations of Cui Hu’s story across periods. It became a layered discourse that served as a complex system of references, based on which not only the meaning of Cui Hu’s poem and romance was enriched, but also new stories were engagingly read.

I started the thesis by justifying the subject of “embedded poems” from both historical and theoretical perspectives. Originating in the late Tang Dynasty and developing with the evolution of chanting and recitation literature (*jiangchang wenxue*), poetry embedded in story narratives should be treated as a special poetic genre that especially relies on the *dialogic* environment around it. Cui Hu’s poem and romance in *Benshi shi* typified one of the earliest examples of this genre; its evolution in later dynasties demonstrated the significance of studying the poetry-story relationship.

Following the introduction of Cui Hu's poem and romance in *Benshi shi*, I analyzed various generic adaptations of Cui Hu's story from the Song Dynasty to the late Ming period. As critics, historians and literary scholars always had different perceptions of the notion of "benshi," the poetry-story relationship never remained constant and stable. In the late Ming Dynasty, Meng Chengshun's play *Three Visits to the Haven of Peach Blossoms* distinguished itself from all the adaptations of Cui Hu's story with its sophistication and refinement. Through a comprehensive analysis of the *dialogues* within and outside of the text in the late Ming society, I contended that this play helped shape a popularized romantic discourse of "renmian taohua."

In the final chapter, I discussed the formation of the trope "renmian taohua" and its modern twists. As examples, I analyzed Ouyang Yuqian's Peking opera and Ge Fei's contemporary novel, demonstrating the strong vitality of "renmian taohua" as a cultural reference in China and the possibilities of reshaping it from a romantic discourse that suggested the male fantasy of female beauty into a modern discourse concerning women. Though appropriating the trope with different perspectives, the modern adaptations connected to the classical in the sense that they were produced and perceived in an established discursive context of "renmian taohua." As Bakhtin used the notion of "heteroglossia" to characterize the 19<sup>th</sup>-century novel as a distinct genre, the trope of "renmian taohua" marked itself as a typical case to illustrate the significance of poetry-story relationship in Chinese literary studies.

#### **4.1 FINAL REMARKS AND FUTURE AGENDA**

In this final remark, I want to explain why I am interested in studying "embedded poems" and why I think this type of poems might be able to contribute to the study of Ming-Qing poetics.

I got interested in this topic initially because of my curiosity for the Ming-Qing poetry. My first few encounters with Ming-Qing poetry taught me about its distinction from previous poetic compositions, namely, the Tang and Song poetry. More specifically, I felt the “distinction” came from the issue of poetic criteria and value judgment, which was contested by many critics, literati and poets of various periods.

As I mentioned in the introduction of the thesis, forms of poetic representation can serve as dynamics for the change of poetics. A Tang literati poem might be elegant if the poet was driven by the ambition to win the civil service examination; a mural poem, in contrast, might be simple-styled and easier to understand because they were oriented as a method to conveying messages. Poetry was influenced by different purposes of composition as well as the occasions of representation, communication and circulation. In this situation, criteria for poetic evaluation became plural and complex, not only meaning the aesthetic values set up by traditional poetic criticism in the Song Dynasty.

In the Ming-Qing period, the complexity of poetic culture was also an important problem for study. A large body of Chinese and Western scholarship has covered different categories of Ming-Qing poetry. Traditional poetic criticism such as *shihua* 詩話 (remarks on poetry) and *cihua* 詞話 (remarks on lyrics) in Ming and Qing periods remained relatively in the same style as the Song Dynasty, indicating that the established aesthetics of poetry was still acknowledged and practiced by educated literati during the period. Ming-Qing women’s poetry, however, added to the distinction of Ming-Qing poetry with its large quantity and high diversity. The traditional poetic criticism could not be fully employed to appreciate Ming-Qing women’s poetry because of women’s different social identities, writing environment and perspectives from their male counterparts. Investigation in this field usually adopts a plural set of criteria that contains a

variety of approaches, methods and perspectives of questioning.<sup>79</sup> Depending on the principle of categorization, there existed many other types of poems in the Ming-Qing period that stayed away from traditional poetics, and among them one prominent group was poems embedded within popular forms of narrative. An examination of fiction and drama in the Ming-Qing period would demonstrate the frequent appearance of poems in them. These embedded poems no longer functioned as an independent genre; rather, their *dialogue* with the surrounding narration became important, in a sense that the narratives enriched the meaning of the poem while circulated it to a wider audience.

Admittedly, the case of Cui Hu's poem and story cannot sufficiently lead to a firm conclusion that the poetic criteria in the Ming-Qing period had changed. But, considering the popularity of embedded poems in the Ming-Qing era, I think the study of poetry-story relationship might provide a particular perspective for us to further investigate into the shift of Ming-Qing poetics from its previous paradigms and standards. To be sure, this deserves more research and efforts.

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<sup>79</sup> Studies of Ming-Qing women's poetry adopted different methodologies and analytical perspectives. Some employed a thematic approach, such as Xiaorong Li's work *Women's Poetry of Late Imperial China: Transforming the Inner Chambers* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2012), which focused on the concept of "boudoir" (*gui* 闺) in women's poetry; some adopted historical methods and biographical perspectives, such as Grace Fong's work *Herself an Author: Gender, Agency, and Writing in Late Imperial China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008).

## APPENDIX A

### CUI HU'S STORY IN *BENSHI SHI*

博陵崔護，姿質甚美，而孤潔寡合。舉進士下第。清明日，獨游都城南，得居人莊，一畝之宮，而花木叢萃，寂若無人。扣門久之，有女子自門隙窺之，問曰：「誰耶？」以姓字對，曰：「尋春獨行，酒渴求飲。」女入，以杯水至，開門設床命坐，獨倚小桃斜柯佇立，而意屬殊厚，妖姿媚態，綽有餘妍，崔以言挑之，不對，目注者久之。崔辭去，送至門，如不勝情而入。崔亦眷盼而歸，嗣後絕不復至。及來歲清明日，忽思之，情不可抑，徑往尋之。門牆如故，而已鎖扃之。因題詩於左扉曰：「去年今日此門中，人面桃花相映紅。人面只今何處去，桃花依舊笑春風。」後數日，偶至都城南，復往尋之，聞其中有哭聲，扣門問之，有老父出曰：「君非崔護耶？」曰：「是也。」又哭曰：「君殺吾女。」護驚起，莫知所答。老父曰：「吾女笄年知書，未適人，自去年以來，常恍惚若有所失。比日與之出，及歸，見左扉有字，讀之，入門而病，遂絕食數日而死。吾老矣，此女所以不嫁者，將求君子以托吾身，今不幸而殞，得非君殺之耶？」又特大哭。崔亦感慟，請入哭之。尚儼然在床。崔舉其首，枕其股，哭而祝曰：「某在斯，某在斯。」須臾開目，半日復活矣。父大喜，遂以女歸之。（《本事詩·情感》）

Cui Hu from Boling, possessed talents however a solitary personality. [He] failed the civil service examination. On a Qingming Day, [Hu] explored around the south of the capital city came across a small village, which was shaded by clusters of flowers and trees, however isolated as if no one was living there. After [Hu] knocked on the door for a while, a girl opened the door and looked outside. [The girl] asked: Who is that? Hu answered with his name, saying: [I] walked alone in the spring, feeling thirsty and looking for some water. The girl brought some water and invited Cui Hu in. She leaned on a peach tree, looking very beautiful. Cui Hu tantalized her with words, but she did not respond, just staring at him for a while. When Cui left, she sent him off at the door, and returned as if overwhelmed by strong emotions. Cui also returned with strong attachment, but afterwards, he did not come back until next year.

The next Qingming day, [Cui Hu] suddenly thought of the girl and could not suppress his feelings, so he went straight to find her. The village remained the same, while the door was locked up. In this situation, Cui Hu inscribed a poem on the wall, reading,

This very day last year, oh, at this very place,  
A pretty face mirrored the flowers of peach trees.  
I do not know today where shines the pretty face;  
Only the pretty flowers still smile in vernal breeze.

A few days later, when he happened to pass the capital south, he went back again to the village and heard bursts of cry. He knocked on the door and an old man answered. The old man asked: Are you Cui Hu? Reply: Yes. The old man cried: You killed my daughter! Hu was surprised and did not know what to say. The old man continued: My daughter is fifteen years old; she knows how to read and has never been married. Since last year, she was often absent-minded, as if having lost something. That day I was out with her; as we returned, there were lines of poetry on the wall. After my daughter read the poem, she immediately fell ill, and died of refusing to eat anything for a few days. I am already an old man. I have not married my daughter to anyone because I am waiting for a gentleman. But now she is dead, isn't it you that killed her? The old man cried loudly. Cui Hu was also quite moved, and deplored to go in and cry for the girl. He found [the girl] was still lying on the bed, neatly dressed. Cui Hu placed her head on his leg and talked to her, "I'm here! I'm here!" After a while [the girl] opened her eyes, and came back to life. The father was very happy, and married her daughter to Cui Hu. (From "Moved by Feelings," *Benshi shi*)

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