

## Article

# An Analysis of the Relationship between *Shenxian Daohua Ju* and Daoism of the Yuan Dynasty

Jing Tan <sup>1,2</sup>  and Xiangfei Bao <sup>3,\*</sup> <sup>1</sup> School of Chinese Language and Literature, Wuhan University, Wuhan 430072, China<sup>2</sup> Department of Chinese and History, City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong 999077, China<sup>3</sup> School of Foreign Languages and Literature, Wuhan University, Wuhan 430072, China

\* Correspondence: baolangfei@whu.edu.cn

**Abstract:** The *Shenxian daohua ju* of the Yuan dynasty closely relates to Daoism. However, the essence and boundary of these two concepts have not been clearly defined and delineated in the existing research, which leads to confusion in analyzing their relationship. This article provides methodologies for defining *Shenxian daohua ju* and Daoism. Based on the extant Yuan *zaju* texts and confined to the themes of seclusion, deliverance, and ascending to immortality, we enumerate the particular dramatic texts of *Shenxian daohua ju*. Then, we limit the objects of the concept of Daoism to specific Daoist sects in history and highlight that the criteria for determining whether a *Shenxian Dao* (Celestial Being Sect) belongs to Daoism are provided by the officially recognized *Daozang* (Daoist canon). According to the above understanding of these two concepts, we explore their relationship from the following perspectives. First, in terms of composition subjects, these include the frustrated Confucian literati, the vassal Kings, and the imperial literati; the *Shenxian daohua ju* written by frustrated literati in the Yuan dynasty is not the embodiment of Daoist doctrines as some of the researchers conclude. Second, in light of the “aesthetic distinction”, we can also take *Shenxian daohua ju* as pure literary works and interpret these dramas from their literary structures and rhythmical forms. Third, from the perspective of the literary tradition, although with the adoption of Daoist themes, the *Shenxian daohua ju* of the Yuan dynasty still belongs to the Confucian poetic tradition. Its negation of secular life and advocacy of the ideal world follow the Confucian poetic teachings of “criticizing those above”. Objectively speaking, due to the influence of Daoism, the *Shenxian daohua ju* with the Daoist themes breaks through the taboo topics prescribed in Confucian literary principles to a certain extent and enriches Chinese literature.

**Keywords:** *Shenxian daohua ju*; Yuan *zaju*; Daoism; aesthetic distinction; frustrated literati; Confucian poetic tradition



**Citation:** Tan, Jing, and Xiangfei Bao. 2022. An Analysis of the Relationship between *Shenxian Daohua Ju* and Daoism of the Yuan Dynasty. *Religions* 13: 776. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13090776>

Academic Editor: Thomas Michael

Received: 13 July 2022

Accepted: 23 August 2022

Published: 25 August 2022

**Publisher's Note:** MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



**Copyright:** © 2022 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

## 1. Introduction

Many studies point out that the traditional Chinese drama (*xiqu* 戲曲) has had an inextricable relationship with religion since its origin (Ridgeway 1915, p. 268; Wang 2010, pp. 1–15; Zeng 2008, pp. 22–34). In the Yuan dynasty (1260–1368), there formed a specific category of *zaju* (雜劇)<sup>1</sup> named *Shenxian daohua ju* (神仙道化劇) which means literally “transformation by the immortals”. *Shenxian daohua ju* closely relates to Daoism, especially the Quanzhen sect of Daoism (Quanzhen Jiao 全真教) (Wang 2007, p. 21).<sup>2</sup> Most researchers agree on the significant influence that Daoism has on dramas of this category, but they have different opinions on how the influence functions. One view is that *Shenxian daohua ju* is the embodiment of Daoist doctrines (You 1964; Wang 2007; Wu 2008); another view is that Daoism merely provides themes and materials for these dramas (Yu 1988; Qu 2017, p. 46; Wang 2018).

Both views have their drawbacks. If *Shenxian daohua ju* is the embodiment of Daoist doctrines, then from where come the literary values of these dramas? Namely, in what sense

do these dramas belong to literary works rather than religious scriptures? Suppose Daoism only provides themes and materials for *Shenxian daohua ju*, and the gist of these dramas has nothing to do with religion. How are they different from dramas on other themes? In view of the above problems, we will thoroughly reflect on the relationship between Daoism and *Shenxian daohua ju* in this article and try to offer a more reasonable solution.

In addition, clarifying the relationship between *Shenxian daohua ju* and Daoism has an extra benefit. Considering this problem means reviewing the relationship between literature and religion in a specific context.

## 2. What Are *Shenxian daohua ju* and Daoism?

In the research fields of *Shenxian daohua ju* and Daoism, most studies directly bypass the definition of these two concepts and mainly focus on discussing their relationship. With a review of the existing research, neither concept has a concrete extension. Therefore, the so-called relationship differentiation is bound to fall into confusion.

What is *Shenxian daohua ju*? To answer this question, we limit the object first to the Yuan dynasty when this category came into being. Under this premise, we can confine the investigation of this dramatic category to a relatively closed textual scope, that is, within the extant texts of the Yuan *zaju*.

Xia Tingzhi (夏庭芝, ca. 1300–1375), the famous dramatist and literati of the Yuan dynasty, has a preliminary classification of *zaju*. He classifies *zaju* into ten themes: “imperial role, inner chamber’s mournful mood, courtesan, young female role, male role, beggar, brigand, official and beadle, transformation by Immortals, and household affairs (駕頭, 閨怨, 鴛兒, 花旦, 披秉, 破衫兒, 綠林, 公吏, 神仙道化, 家長里短之類)” (Xia 1959, p. 7). Apparently, the category of the *Shenxian daohua* (transformation by Immortals) has already appeared in this earliest classification of Yuan *zaju*.<sup>3</sup> Later in *A Formulary of Correct Sounds for an Era of Great Peace* (*Taihe Zhengyin Pu* 太和正音譜), a musical and prosodic study of *qu* lyrics written by the Ming dramatist and critic Zhu Quan (朱權, 1378–1448), there is a particular chapter of *Twelve Categories of Zaju* (*zaju shier ke* 雜劇十二科). In this chapter, Zhu Quan divides *zaju* into twelve categories according to the themes as follows:

1. Transformation by the Immortals (*Shenxian Daohua* 神仙道化)
2. Living in seclusion and finding joy in the Way (*Yinju Ledao* 隱居樂道) (alternatively, Woods and springs, hills and valleys (*Linquan Qiuhe* 又曰林泉丘壑))
3. Those who wear the official robes and hold the tablet<sup>4</sup> (*Pipao Binghu* 批袍秉笏) (alternatively, *zaju* about the monarch and minister, *Junchen Zaju* 即君臣雜劇)
4. Loyal governor and martyr (*Zhongchen Lieshi* 忠臣烈士)
5. People with features of filial piety and incorruptness (*Xiaoyi Lianjie* 孝義廉節)
6. Rebuking covetous officials who are traitors and slanderers (*Chijian Machan* 叱奸罵讒)
7. Exiled ministers and orphaned children (*Zhuchen Guzi* 逐臣孤子)
8. The clash of arms and military scenes (*Bodao Ganbang* 鉞刀趕棒) (alternatively, *Tuobo Zaju* 即脫膊雜劇)
9. Romantic love story (*Fenghua Xueyue* 風花雪月)
10. Sadness and joy, separation and reunion (*Beihuan Lihe* 悲歡離合)
11. Pieces that depict the licentious manners of courtesans (*Yanhua Fendai* 煙花粉黛) (namely, *zaju* of young females role, *Huadan Zaju* 花旦雜劇)
12. Immortals and demons, plays about supernatural beings (*Shentou Guimian* 神頭鬼面) (namely, plays about immortals and Buddhas, *Shenfo Zaju* 神佛雜劇) (Bazin 1838, pp. LVII–LVIII)<sup>5</sup>

(一曰神仙道化；二曰隱居樂道（又曰林泉丘壑）；三曰披袍秉笏（也稱君臣雜劇）；四曰忠臣烈士；五曰孝義廉節；六曰叱奸罵讒；七曰逐臣孤子；八曰鉞刀趕棒（又名脫膊雜劇）；九曰風花雪月；十曰悲歡離合；十一曰煙花粉黛（也稱花旦雜劇）；十二曰神頭鬼面（即神佛雜劇）。) (Zhu 1959, p. 24)

According to the classification principle of the MECE (Mutually Exclusive and Collectively Exhaustive), Zhu Quan’s classification of Yuan *zaju* has apparent drawbacks. He does

not achieve mutual independence in his classification because the first category intersects with the second category of *Yinju Ledao* (隱居樂道) and the twelfth category of *Shentou Guimian* (神頭鬼面). Zhu Quan neither defines the categories nor assigns each *zaju* text to a specific category. So there are different understandings of what is *Shenxian daohua ju*, and different understandings lead to different numbers of this dramatic category (Yao 1980; Yang 2008).

In this article, we do not dwell on the original intention of Zhu Quan's classification. Instead, we take a broader point of view to identify the *Shenxian daohua ju*. We take all dramas that depict seclusion, deliverance, and transformation as *Shenxian daohua ju*. As Deng Shaoji says, "most of the *Shenxian daohua ju* are biographical stories of the Daoist ancestors. These dramas describe their enlightenment and ascending to be immortals, or their legends of helping the ordinary people and ghosts to obtain religious deliverance" (Deng 1991, p. 50).

West and Idema offer a list of *Shenxian daohua ju* with 15 plays. However, it includes not only the deliverance *zaju* of the Ming dynasty but also the plays related to Buddhism (West and Idema 2015, pp. 202–3). According to the delineation above and our research topic, we list here 19 works of *Shenxian daohua ju* of the Yuan dynasty.<sup>6</sup> The discussion of *Shenxian daohua ju* in this article will be based mainly on these texts.<sup>7</sup> Through this relatively stable and defined range of *zaju* texts, we have answered the question of "what is *Shenxian daohua ju*" by delineating its extension.

Compared with the definition of *Shenxian daohua ju*, "what is Daoism" is a more complicated question. Researchers may have different answers. Some Daoist priests take Daoism as a permanent and sacred religion. In light of their religious feelings, such a belief is easy to understand (Ren 1990, p. 6), while, from the researcher's point of view, their assertion of Daoism is not in accordance with the historical facts.

Besides, if Daoism is a logically self-consistent system like Euclidean geometry, then it will eventually be clearly defined. However, a general examination of Daoism's thoughts and bibliographical classification will reveal its internal contradictions. The *fulu* (符)<sup>8</sup> of Daoism originates from ancient folk witchcraft, while the technique of *danding* (*danding zhishu* 丹鼎之術)<sup>9</sup> may trace back to the immortal magic in the Warring States period (*Zhangguo shiqi* 戰國時期, 480–221 BC.). The thought of the Daoist school in the pre-Qin period (先秦道家思想), represented by philosophers of Laozi (老子) and Zhuangzi (莊子), has been reformed and taken advantage of by later Daoism (道教). Daoism deified Laozi and merged his thought with the ancient ethnic and folk religions (Ren 1990, p. 7; Hartz 2009, p. 69). So, there is no clear boundary between folk beliefs and Daoism regarding celestial beings. As Russell Kirkland stresses, unlike Buddhism, Confucianism, or Christianity, Daoism has no original teachings, and Daoists do not feel obliged to hew their beliefs and practices to any putative original standard (Kirkland 2004, p. 12). For such a religion, it is impossible to possess a logically self-consistent religious system.

If Daoism is neither a permanent mysterious existence nor a logically self-consistent theological system, how should we grasp the boundaries of Daoism?

Japanese scholar Kobayashi Masayoshi advocates that the designated object of the concept of Daoism should be limited to the specific Daoism and its sects in history. He claims that the religion acknowledged as "Daoism" was formed and founded in the middle of the fifth century in the Song dynasty, ruled by the Liu family (劉宋, 420–479, known as Liu Song in history). Daoism began with *Tianshi Dao* (天師道, Way of the Celestial Masters) (Kobayashi 2010, p. 2). Accordingly, religious sects that appeared earlier than the Liu Song dynasty, such as the *Taiping Dao* (太平道, Taiping Sect) and *Wudoumi Dao* (五斗米道, Way of the Five Pecks of Rice), must be excluded from Daoism. This opinion contradicts most scholars' views (Ren 1990, pp. 31–41).

Kobayashi has two reasons to support his proposition that Daoism began with the *Tianshi Dao*. First, the *Tianshi Dao* differentiated itself consciously from Confucianism and Buddhism. Second, it was *Tianshi Dao* that first used the classification of *Sandong* (三洞, Three Grottoes) to organize its religious scriptures.

The classification of *Sandong* is closely related to the later compilation of *Daozang* (道藏, Daoist Canon)—because the compilation follows the bibliographical system of *Sandong Sifu Shi'er lei* (三洞四輔十二類, three Grottos, four auxiliaries, and twelve classes) (Kobayashi 2010, p. 13). *Sandong Sifu Shi'er lei* took *Sandong* as its core content (Kobayashi 2010, p. 216). That is why the classification of *Sandong* is so significant in the foundation of Daoism.

Kobayashi points out that the compilation of *Daozang* is a strict trial for the author of the Daoist scripture. In the history of Daoism, Daoist scriptures have been created in various ways. They will be recognized as the Daoist classics once they are selected and included in *Daozang*. And then, the *Shenxian Dao* (神仙道, Celestial Being Sect) or the emerging religion that created the recognized scriptures will be officially acknowledged as Daoism. Therefore, whether the religious scriptures are included in *Daozang* becomes a matter of life and death for the Celestial Being Sect and the emerging religion. If the scripture of a particular religious sect is included in *Daozang*, that sect will be sheltered by the emperor. On the contrary, if *Daozang* excludes the scripture, the government may suppress the emerging sect as an evil and obscene cult (Kobayashi 2010, pp. 216–17).

Accordingly, the crux of “what is Daoism” turns out to be clear. If a Celestial Being Sect wants to be named and treated as Daoism, the premise is to obtain official recognition. In this perspective, Kobayashi’s view that Daoism began with *Tianshi Dao* in the Liu Song dynasty becomes easier to understand. That is because: *Tianshi Dao* was established in the Liu Song period and officially recognized; the bibliographical system of *Sandong Sifu Shi'er lei*, significant to *Daozang*, began with *Tianshi Dao*; and the *Daozang* compiled under the imperial order finally plays the role of determining what Daoism is.

Understanding Daoism this way has great advantages; otherwise, it is impossible to define what Daoism is. In short, no matter how bizarre the religious scriptures are, as long as they are officially recognized and listed in *Daozang*, they do belong publicly to orthodox Daoism (Kirkland 2004, p. 13). On the contrary, no matter how reasonable the scriptures sound, as long as they have not been officially recognized, the religious sects that possess these scriptures are treated as cults of evil and obscene, and may be severely suppressed. Therefore, the difference between Daoism and other folk Celestial Being Sects is not an essential theological one but a difference caused by governmental administration. The founding of Quanzhen Daoism (*Quanzhen Jiao* 全真教) and how it became officially recognized can be an excellent example to support this view (Ren 1990, pp. 520–27).

In addition, we must stress that being officially recognized is not based on the logical self-consistency of the theological system. Those scriptures included in *Daozang* vary greatly and are hard to keep consistent in terms of content. For example, the *Daozang* compiled after the Song dynasty (960–1279) includes nearly all the works of the Daoist school ever since the pre-Qin period and counts all of those works as Daoist canon (Ren 1990, p. 14). However, if we compare only the thoughts between Laozi and Zhuangzi, we would find apparent differences, not to mention the differences between Laozi, Zhuangzi, and other philosophers of the Daoist school.

According to the above understanding of Daoism, there is a clear boundary for Daoism in terms of historical facts. In this way, we can empirically summarize the characteristics of Daoism regardless of whether there is a logical contradiction between the Daoist scriptures. As a religion in close cooperation with the authorities, Daoism has the following two main characteristics:

First, Daoism is not anti-Confucianism. Since Emperor Wu (漢武帝, ruled from 141 BC.–87 BC.) during the Han dynasty (202 BC.–220 AD.), Confucianism has always been dominant in China. As a religion needing official recognition, Daoism does not appear as the opposite of Confucianism but as its subsidiary. What is more, when there are conflicts between Daoism and Confucianism, it is Daoism that adapts itself to the Confucian principles. Zhang Daoling (張道陵, 34–156)’s *Laozi Xiang'er Zhu* (老子想爾註, *Xiang'er Commentary of Daodejing*) is an excellent Daoist work that demonstrated this process of adaptation (Jao 1991). Daoist theology considered maintaining Confucian etiquette the highest priority in its early period. Later Daoism mostly took the position of being loyal

to the Confucian patriarchal system. A large number of norms in the Daoist creed are consistent with Confucian ethics (Ren 1990, pp. 14–15).

Second, Daoism does not refuse or detest this-worldly life. The ordinary Chinese people do not believe that happy life begins only in an isolated otherworld. Therefore, death is of no benefit. It is best to be disease-free, disaster-free, and immortal. Daoism caters well to this kind of expectation of Chinese people. When talking about the functions of Daoism, Kobayashi concludes that Daoism claims to make people live eternally. Daoism may save parents and ancestors and make them ascend to the eternal realm, even if they have already been in hell. Daoism can dispel diseases and disasters of the masses (Kobayashi 2010, p. 240).

We conclude that Daoism is not a religion that stands aloof from worldly affairs. “Nature” in Daoism no longer functions as renouncing worldly affairs as it is in the thought of Zhuangzi. Although Daoism advocates that people can become immortals, it does not exclude worldly material things. That is to say, people can become immortals with their physical bodies and retain all the secular benefits in the immortal world.<sup>10</sup>

### 3. Is *Shenxian Daohua Ju* of the Yuan Dynasty the Embodiment of Daoist Doctrines?

Indeed, many scholars consider that the dramas of transformation by the Daoist immortals serve the needs of Daoism and are subordinate to Daoism. These dramas function to promote the doctrines of Daoism (Wang 2007). You Guo'en has a comment on the *Shenxian daohua ju*: “They promote the Daoist doctrines to the utmost, which represents a negative tendency in the writing of *zaju*” (You 1964, p. 796). The negative tendency he said refers mainly to the promotion of superstition. Whether the so-called superstitious contents involved in *Shenxian daohua ju* are negative or not is another topic. Still, these dramas are considered by researchers like You Guoen as the preaching of Daoist teachings.

Wu Guangzheng presents further that, through the self-introduction of the roles upon their entrance on the stage, the *Shenxian daohua ju* presents in detail the process of how these roles are enlightened, what celestial positions and responsibilities they maintain, and what ranks and affiliations they possess. Therefore, the *Shenxian daohua ju* in Yuan and Ming dynasties can be regarded as a “Diagram of ranks of true immortals” (*zhenling weiye tu* 真靈位業圖) of the Quanzhen Daoism. At the same time, through abundant songs, dialogues, plots, and even role-playing, these dramas propagandize the Daoist theory of *xingming shuangxiu* (性命雙修, combined cultivation of body life and inner nature) of the Quanzhen Daoism thoroughly (Wu 2008).

Wu does not differentiate the *Shenxian daohua ju* of the Yuan dynasty from that of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644). Studies have shown that dramas of this category vary in different dynasties. At least in the Ming dynasty, more imperial literati were involved in writing, and more upper-class audiences were interested in these dramas (Zheng 2008). In any case, Wu's point is that the *Shenxian daohua ju*, no matter in the Yuan dynasty or Ming dynasty, is the embodiment of Daoist teachings, especially the doctrines of Quanzhen Daoism. In order to better meet the goal of this article, we need to treat the dramas of different dynasties differently.

To discuss whether the *Shenxian daohua ju* is the representation of Daoist doctrines, we can examine it first from the creators of these dramas. Playwrights of the *Shenxian daohua ju* in the Yuan and Ming dynasties may be classified into the frustrated literati, imperial literati, and vassal Kings. Both frustrated literati and imperial literati are Confucian scholars. The main difference is that the former has a slim chance of success in their political career, while the latter benefit from serving the imperial court.

According to our delineation of Daoism in the previous discussion, the palace edition of the ritual dramas written by vassal Kings and imperial literati seem reasonably to be regarded as the embodiment of the Daoist doctrines. These dramas played the same function as some of the Daoist scriptures, such as the *Precious Goodness Scroll* (*Baoshan Juan* 寶善卷) and *Collected Works of Group of Immortals* (*Quanzhen Qunxian Ji* 全真群仙集).

But the *Shenxian daohua ju* composed by those frustrated literati seems to be a different case. In light of Wu Mei's collation of Yuan *zaju*, there are few *Shenxian daohua ju* written

by vassal Kings and imperial literati in the Yuan dynasty. It is just the group of frustrated literati who constitute the playwrights of such dramas (Wu 2000, pp. 139–46). In this article, our concentration is on the relationship between the *Shenxian daohua ju* and Daoism in the Yuan dynasty. Therefore, we should focus on the frustrated literati.

The above definition of Daoism by the designated objects shows that Daoism is not a religion that stands aloof from worldly affairs as most people think. It is an officially recognized religion and cooperates closely with the authorities. The *Shenxian daohua ju* created by vassal kings and imperial literati are good supplementary evidence to demonstrate the characters of engagement in this-worldly affairs that Daoism possesses.

From the Sui and Tang dynasties (581–907), Confucian scholars realized their political ambitions through the imperial examination (*keju kaoshi* 科舉考試). However, when it comes to the Yuan dynasty, the imperial examination was suspended for a long time during the early period of Mongol rule. Though the imperial examination was resumed later, the focus of the examination also changed (Yu 2013, p. 28). Under such circumstances, seeking an official position successfully by mastering the Confucian classics becomes more difficult for most Confucian scholars. Literati of the Yuan dynasty used to mock their status as “the eighth, the prostitute; the ninth, the Confucian literati; the tenth, the beggar” (Wen 2018, pp. 204–6). Although their self-mockery is not a historical fact, the status of the Confucian literati in the Yuan dynasty is indeed much lower than those in the Song dynasty (960–1279) (Hsiao 2008, p. 26; Hu 1989; Qiu 1999, p. 159).

Generally speaking, these frustrated literati were more familiar with Confucian classics than the Daoist scriptures. What they internalized was Confucianism rather than Daoism. Therefore, it is unlikely that the *Shenxian daohua ju* created by such scholars are promotions of the Daoist doctrines on purpose.

In *Shenxian daohua ju*, the deities and immortals, enlightened by others or led others to be enlightened, are all incarnations of Confucian literati. Their manners are always Confucian style because only Confucian scholars are familiar with Confucianism’s speech, behavior, and thought. The immortalized protagonists and Confucian literati seem to have huge differences, but they all possess similar Confucian cultivation internally. Therefore, the *Shenxian daohua ju* of the Yuan dynasty is, to some extent, the self-writing of those frustrated Confucian literati. In these plays, we “can always find the typical characteristics of the writers themselves” (Deng 1991, p. 165).

Yu Qiuyu further points out that “the writers of the *Shenxian daohua ju* do not preach the religious teachings and methods from the standpoint of Daoists and Buddhists. They despise fame and fortune from the standpoint of a frustrated and arrogant Confucian literati and advocate a detached attitude towards secular life” (Yu 1985, p. 168). We are not sure whether the Confucian literati’s advocacy comes from their sincere heart; at least, their promotion of the “ideal land” differs from the promotion of the Daoism doctrines.

However, we must stress that considering the complexity and the fluidity of the *Daozang*, we cannot guarantee that the *Shenxian daohua ju* of the Yuan dynasty will never be included in *Daozang* in the future. If *Daozang* accepts these dramatic texts, they would indeed be Daoist scriptures, and of course, they would embody Daoist teachings. The “Twelve Classes” (*Shi’er lei* 十二類) of the *Daozang* include primary texts (*Benwen* 本文), talismans (*Shenfu* 神符), commentaries (*Yujue* 玉訣), diagrams and illustrations (*Lingtu* 靈圖), histories and genealogies (*Pulu* 譜錄), precepts (*Jielu* 戒律), ceremonies (*Weiyi* 威儀), rituals (*Fangfa* 方法), practices (*Zhongshu* 衆術), biographies (*Jizhuan* 記傳), hymns (*Zansong* 讚頌), and memorials (*Biaozou* 表奏) (Luo 2014, p. 201). *Jizhuan* and *Zansong* are similar to literary genres in the traditional classification of Chinese literature. Then, it is not impossible for *zaju* to be the thirteenth class. The *zaju* playwright Ma Zhiyuan (馬致遠, ca. 1250–ca.1321/1324) of the Yuan dynasty is crowned “the immortal Ma” (Ma Shenxian 馬神仙) in the Ming dynasty. It can be seen as a supporting example that the *Shenxian daohua ju* might be possibly included in *Daozang*. Nevertheless, Ma Zhiyuan did not become a Daoist and did not stand aloof from worldly affairs until his death (Zhang 2009).

In fact, it is not a rare case that Daoists also compose literary works to promote Daoist doctrines. For example, Wang Chongyang (王重陽, 1113–1170) and the Seven Masters of Quanzhen (Quanzhen Qizi 全真七子) all employ literary forms of the poem, metrical lyrics (*ci* 詞), and *sanqu* (散曲) to promote the religious thought of the Quanzhen Daoism. Their poetic works are eventually included in *Daozang* as the Daoist scriptures.<sup>11</sup>

#### 4. Is the *Shenxian Daohua Ju* of the Yuan Dynasty Irrelevant to Daoism?

To assert that the *Shenxian daohua ju* has nothing to do with Daoism seems to be against our intuition because many characters involved in these dramas are recognized Daoist figures, such as Zhuang Zhou (莊周), Liu Chen (劉晨), Ruan Zhao (阮肇), Zhong Liquan (鐘離權), Tieguai Li (鐵拐李), Chen Jiqing (陳季卿), Ma Danyang (馬丹陽), and Chen Tuan (陳搏). The themes involved, such as seclusion, deliverance, and immortalization, are indeed significant themes of Daoism. It is insufficient to prove that a literary work promotes Daoist teachings only because it takes Daoist figures as its protagonists and performs stories with common Daoist themes. However, it is also against our intuition to a considerable extent to assert that such dramas are irrelevant to Daoism.

A more objective view or proposal may be that Daoism only provides literature materials for the *Shenxian daohua ju*. Just because the playwrights are mostly Confucian literati, the literature materials of the *Shenxian daohua ju* are not limited to that of Daoism. It also includes materials from Buddhism, folk legends, historical stories, officialdom, etc. Confucian literati are not Daoists and have no obligation to be loyal to Daoist scriptures.

However, this proposal of the “material supply” function inspires us to reflect thoroughly. If the material of the literary work and its intention can be separated, then the content of the work can be separated from its form as well. In this case, it is a logical deduction that a real work of art should not be restricted by the content, and the beauty of the work should be found in its form and structure.

From the perspective of modern classification, *Shenxian daohua ju* belongs to the scope of literature; therefore, it is also a work of art in a broad sense. When facing works of art, we should pay attention to their aesthetic characteristics rather than aspects such as from where they originate, whom they serve, or what ideology they propagandize. That is to say, we should interpret *Shenxian daohua ju* in an aesthetic way and attach much importance to its aesthetic features, such as the harmony of the rhyme and metrics of the songs, the vividness and efficacy of the rhetorical devices, the ingenious structure of the story-telling, and so on.

However, dealing with the *Shenxian daohua ju* through this lens requires an aesthetic consciousness that Gadamer (1900–2002) calls “aesthetic distinction” (ästhetische Unterscheidung). In Gadamer’s analysis that in order to interpret an opus as a “pure work of art”, we must put aside everything in which a work is rooted as its primitive relationship, as well as put aside all religious or secular influence in which a work exists and derives meaning from it. According to the requirement of the aesthetic consciousness, the aesthetic experience should focus on the real artwork and put aside the non-aesthetic elements, such as purpose, function, and the meaning of the content (Gadamer 1990, p. 91). With the consciousness of aesthetic distinction, we obtain the possibility to extract the *Shenxian daohua ju* of the Yuan dynasty from the cultural and religious context that cultivates these dramas. In this sense, *Shenxian daohua ju* is irrelevant to Daoism.

From this perspective, readers may appreciate the song suites (*taoshu* 套數) scattered in these dramatic texts and explore the metrical relations between the song suites and other rhythmic genres, such as poems of the Tang dynasty and Lyrical songs (*ci*) of the Song dynasty (Wang 1992; Liu 2014). Meanwhile, the language and expression of the *Shenxian Daohua ju* have a particular tone and style and are full of beautiful figures of speech. The formal structure of the *Shenxian daohua ju* is worthy of attention as well. For instance, the “dream narratives” adopted in these dramas help to construct the “dreaming-awakening” binary narrative structure and the metadramatic structure of “dream within the dream”, which play an essential role in the promotion and action of the dramas (Liao 2000, pp. 245–300).

However, Gadamer himself is critical of this aesthetic consciousness. He argues that what is put aside by this aesthetic consciousness happens to be things of great importance, and the richness of the works of art are fulfilled just due to these things (Gadamer 1990, p. 91). Gadamer's view is so significant that it inspires us to explore the *Shenxian daohua ju* in the Chinese literary tradition. The following section will focus on this topic in detail.

### 5. Does *Shenxian Daohua Ju* Still Belong to the Tradition of Chinese Poetics?

The maxim of *shi yan zhi* (詩言志, which means the poetry articulates the feelings and wills) dominated from the beginning until the late Qing dynasty (1644–1911). It has almost been regarded as the definition of poetry. In the “Great Preface” to *the Book of Songs* (*Shijing* 詩經), it says, “the poem is that to which what is intently on the mind (*chih* 志) goes. In the mind (*hsin* 心) it is ‘being intent’ (*chih* 志); coming out in language (*yen* 言), it is a poem (*shih* 詩) (詩者, 志之所之也。在心為志, 發言為詩)” (Chen 1983, p. 1).<sup>12</sup> Liu Xie (ca. 465–532), the literary critic and author of *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* (*Wenxin Diaolong* 文心雕龍), says in “An Exegesis of Poetry” (*mingshi* 明詩) that “poetry means discipline, disciplined human feeling” (Liu 1989, p. 171).<sup>13</sup> The Chinese literary critic Zhu Ziqing (朱自清, 1898–1948) points out explicitly that the “feeling and will” articulated in poems refer to those feelings and wills recognized by Confucianism, not those diverted in any other directions (Zhu 1990, p. 130). Accordingly, the function of poetry is to regulate people's feelings and wills, to be exact, to employ Confucian thought and ethics to regulate them, which is the “discipline” of poetry. Confucius' words that “though the *Odes*<sup>14</sup> number three hundred, one phrase can cover them all, namely, ‘with undiverted thoughts’” (Zhu 2011, p. 55)<sup>15</sup> can also be understood in this sense. Therefore, people who appreciate and interpret poetry do not aim to obtain sensual entertainment or pure aesthetic experience but to gain self-education and discipline personal feelings and wills. In this sense, Zhu Ziqing puts forward the view that “*shi yan zhi* is the fundamental principle followed by the thought of *shijiao* (詩教, means poetry is the instrument of teaching and cultivating) of the Han dynasty. *Shijiao* focuses on the reception of the poetry, and its function aims obviously at political disciplining. Hence these two principles (proposed in pre-Qin by Confucius and in the Han dynasty) are telling people how to interpret poetry and take advantage of it” (Zhu 1990, p. 130).

According to the comprehensive review of the history of Chinese literature by Zhu Ziqing, although the form of literature has changed, the tradition of *shijiao* continues. This tradition finally permeates the appreciation and interpretation of all literary works. Logically, if *Yuan zaju* is not the embodiment of religious doctrines, it must be in the *shijiao* tradition and interpreted as the instrument of teaching and cultivating.

However, if we agree that the *Shenxian daohua ju* is subordinate to the Chinese poetic tradition, how do we understand the negation and contempt for fame and fortune expressed by these dramas?

Confucian culture attaches importance not only to disciplined feelings and wills but also to the enterprising spirit. Zhang Dainian (1909–2004) points out that “China's national spirit is condensed in the famous saying of the *Zhouyi Dazhuan* (周易大傳), that is, ‘The movement of heaven is full of power. Thus the superior man makes himself strong and untiring; The earth's condition is receptive devotion. Thus the superior man who has a breadth of character carries the outer world (天行健, 君子以自強不息, 地勢坤, 君子以厚德載物)’” (Zhang 1988, p. 74).<sup>16</sup> To have the breadth of character to carry the outer world demands the cultivation of manners; to make oneself strong and untiring requires ceaseless enterprising.

Confucianism has always given priority to merit and contribution to the state. Fame and fortune better motivate the operation of the Confucian society and are rewards for serving the state with an enterprising spirit. However, the negation of fame and fortune can be read everywhere in the *Shenxian daohua ju* of the Yuan dynasty. For example, in Ma Zhiyuan's *Gaining Enlightenment at Handan: The Dream of Yellow Millet* (*Handan dao xingwu huangliang meng* 邯鄲道省悟黃梁夢), it goes:

“To scramble for success and fame is like balancing on top of a bamboo pole hundreds of feet above the ground. Life is a dangerous game fraught with the four vices—wine, sex, wealth, and anger” (功名二字，如同那百尺高竿上調把戲一般，性命不保，脫不得酒色財氣這四般兒). (Zang 1958, p. 779)<sup>17</sup>

In Fan Zian (范子安)’s *Chen Jiqing is Enlightened to the Way on a Bamboo-leaf Boat* (*Chen Jiqing wudao zhuye zhou* 陳季卿悟道竹葉舟), it goes:

“I sigh over this road to fame and fortune of yours, fraught with waves of danger,  
Truly, you’ll suffer all in vain—

I ask: even if you had Su Qin’s very ministerial seals at your belt, what good would it do?

Just look: in that Gallery Soaring Beyond the Mists, who are the true heroes?

In the precinct of the Golden Valley they are all affected boys and girls.

... ..

What kind of worthiness can you discern?

What kind of dullness?

Even if you cast a likeness of Zhugong of Tao in yellow gold,

In the end you can’t carry off Xishi to float on river and lake!”

(歎你這千丈風波名利途，端的個枉受苦，便做到佩蘇秦相印待何如？你則看淩煙閣那個是真英武，你則看金穀鄉都是些喬男女。你可也辨什麼賢？辨什麼愚？折莫將陶朱公貴像把黃金鑄，倒底也載不的西子泛江湖。) (Zang 1958, p. 1044)<sup>18</sup>

Some people may argue that the texts quoted above do embody Daoist thought. As the previous analysis shows, Daoism is not a religion that stands aloof from worldly affairs. The realm of immortals is just an alternative immortal version of the human world. Correspondingly, it does have a strict hierarchy and equivalent welfare according to different ranks. Therefore, instead of saying that the texts quoted above embody Daoism, they express a particular thought of the Daoist school represented by Laozi and Zhuangzi. Laozi directly criticizes “benevolence and filial piety” (*renxiao* 仁孝): “When the great Way was forsaken, there was humaneness and righteousness; When knowledge and insight appeared, there was great falsity; When the family relationship is at odds, there were filial piety and parental kindness” (大道廢，有仁義；智慧出，有大偽；六親不和，有孝慈) (Wang 2008, p. 43).<sup>19</sup> Zhuangzi shares the same view: “People who graft on charity force themselves to display this virtue in order to gain fame and to enjoy the applause of the world for that which is of no account.” (枝於仁者，擢德塞性以收名聲，使天下簞鼓以奉不及之法，非乎?) (Zhuang 1983, p. 232).<sup>20</sup> Based on the quotations above, we can see that in the thought of the Daoist school, the social construction centered on benevolence and filial piety is the root of all troubles.

Therefore, in the eyes of the Daoist school, fame is nothingness and is not worth pursuing; officialdom is a place of trouble and full of danger. The thought of the Daoist school requires seclusion in nature to escape worldly affairs and to hold a more peaceful life attitude of being content and coexisting with the times and the changes. However, in the eyes of Daoism, nature is not a place of seclusion but a place to transform into immortals. Daoism has tampered with the thought of Laozi through commentaries of Daoist scripture, such as *Xiang'er Commentary of Daodejing* (Laozi Xiang'er Zhu 老子想爾註), to better adapt Laozi’s thought to the secular maxim of ethics (Ren 1990, p. 15).

In addition, the frustrated Confucian literati do not deviate too much from their Confucian beliefs when utilizing the thought of the Daoist school because Confucianism also has thought of seclusion. However, the difference is that Daoist seclusion is a genuine choice, while Confucian seclusion implies criticism of the state and society. In the *Analects*, Confucius has prescribed a maxim of when to be enterprising (*xian* 見) and when to seclude (*yin* 隱). Confucius says: “When the state is well-governed, he should be enterprising. When the state is mal-governed, he should seclude” (天下有道則見，無道則隱) (Zhu 2011, p. 102).<sup>21</sup>

In this sense, the criticism of fame and fortune and the advocacy of seclusion are in accord with the tradition of Confucian teachings. “The Great Preface” of the *Book of Songs* says that, “by *feng* (風) those above cultivate those below; also by *feng* those below criticize those above” (上以風化下，下以風刺上) (Chen 1983, p. 1).<sup>22</sup> Therefore, the criticism of fame and fortune and advocacy of seclusion by Confucian literati do not mean that they advocate Daoism, not to mention that they convert to Daoists. It just means they are composing literary works to “criticize those above” under the Confucian poetic tradition.

It is necessary to emphasize that the criticism of “wine, sex, wealth and anger” in the *Shenxian daohua ju* cannot be simply regarded as a unique feature of Quan Zhen Daoism. The restraint of desire and the cultivation of the mind and feeling are shared requirements among Confucianism, Daoism, and Zen Buddhism (Wang 2013). Compared with the previous Daoist sects, Quanzhen Daoism emphasizes more on “the mind and feeling” (*xinxing* 心性). However, the cultivation of the mind and feeling has always been the priority in Confucianism and Zen Buddhism. It is better to say that Quanzhen Daoism learns from Confucianism and Zen Buddhism in the cultivation of *xinxing* rather than saying that the Confucian literati cultivate their *xinxing* through the practice of Quanzhen Daoism. Liu Zuqian (劉祖謙, ?–1232) recorded in *Chongyang Xianji Ji* (重陽仙跡記):

The master Wang Chongyang, from Zhongnanshan, started learning Confucianism first but eventually became a Daoist. For the beginners who learned Daoism from him, he suggested they read the *Book of Filial Piety* (*Xiaojing* 孝經) and *Daodejing* (道德經) first and taught them to be filial and prudent. His teachings frequently cited the “six classics” of Confucianism. (終南山重陽祖師，始業儒，卒成道，凡接人初機，先必使讀《孝經》《道德經》，又教之以孝謹純一，其立說多引六經為證。) (Wang 2005, p. 326)

In short, the writings of Confucian literati still follow the tradition of Confucian poetics. That some Confucian literati who eventually became Daoist priests and wrote Daoist works, such as Wang Chongyang, is another topic and will not be discussed in this article. In any case, the authors of the *Shenxian daohua ju* of the Yuan dynasty mentioned above are still Confucian literati grown out of the Confucian poetic tradition.

Though the *Shenxian daohua ju* is subordinated to the Confucian poetic tradition and illustrates the spirit of “criticizing those above”, it does introduce some new elements to traditional Chinese literature and bring an apparent breakthrough of the Confucian maxim of when to be enterprising and when to seclude.

*Shenxian daohua ju* of the Yuan dynasty expresses a total negation of the society, regardless of whether the state is well-governed or mal-governed. They deny not only fame and fortune but also ordinary secular life. For example, in *Ma Danyang Thrice Leads Crazy Ren to Enlightenment* (*Ma Danyang sandu Ren Fengzi* 馬丹陽三度任風子), Ma Danyang has a completely negative view of the butcher Ren Fengzi’s happy life “with meat like mountains and wine like rivers” (肉如山岳酒如川) (Zang 1958, p. 1671). By contrast, Confucianism has a positive view of secular life. Confucianism admits that “the desire for food and sex is part of human nature” (食色，性也) (Yang and Yang 2019, p. 217);<sup>23</sup> and Mencius agrees that “male and female should dwell together, is the greatest of human relations” (男女居室，人之大倫也) (Yang and Yang 2019, p. 179).<sup>24</sup> However, *Shenxian daohua ju* expresses a total negation of the conjugal love of husband and wife. Characters such as Guo ma’er and He Lamei in *Lü Dongbin Gets Drunk Three Times in Yueyang Tower* (*Lü Dongbin sanzui Yueyang Lou* 呂洞賓三醉岳陽樓), Liu Jingyang and Taoshi in *Lü Dongbin in Peach and Willow: A Dream of Ascending to Immortality* (*Lü Dongbin taoliu shengxian meng* 呂洞賓桃柳升仙夢), Jin Anshou and Tong Jiaolan in *Iron Crutch Li Leads Golden Lad and Jade Lass to Enlightenment* (*Tieguai Li du Jintong Yunü* 鐵拐李度金童玉女), Lao Liu and Xiao Tao in *Lü Dongbin Thrice Leads the Willow South of the City to Enlightenment* (*Lü Dongbin sandu chengnan liu* 呂洞賓三度城南柳), as well as Niu Lin and Zhao Jiangmei in *Cripple Li Yue: Poetry and Wine at the Wanjiang Pavilion* (*Que Li Yue shijiu Wanjiang Ting* 癱李岳詩酒翫江亭) are all loving couples. Nevertheless, in these dramas, such happy married life is of no value and not the destination of human life. So it is not worth living and must be denied.

Furthermore, the beautiful appearance of human beings is neither worth pursuing because it is fleeting. In *Ma Danyang Leads Head of the Guild Liu to Enlightenment* (*Ma Danyang dutuo Liu Hangshou* 馬丹陽度脫劉行首), Ma Danyang says: “Your waist is now as soft as willow, and your face is now as pink as cherry apple bloom. Once the day comes, the willow will be destroyed by the frost, and the cherry apple bloom will wither in the harsh wind, and it will be so hard to end well” (你如今楊柳腰肢，海棠顏色。有一日霜濃柳葉敗，風急海棠凋，那其間難尋一個下稍。)(Zang 1958, p. 1325).

Within the tradition of Confucianism, the phenomenon that *Shenxian daohua ju* expresses a total negation of the society can be explained by the factual situation of frustrated Confucian literati in the Yuan dynasty. As we have discussed previously, it was difficult for Confucian scholars to gain success by taking the imperial examinations. Meanwhile, the thought of Confucianism itself was suppressed in the Yuan dynasty, at least for most time of the Yuan dynasty. In contrast, Quanzhen Daoism was recognized and supported by the Mongol rulers. Under such circumstances, these frustrated Confucian literati, hiding behind Quanzhen Daoism, wrote *Shenxian daohua ju* and continued their poetic tradition of “criticizing the above”. In other words, their total negation of society is not out of their beliefs but out of their writing strategies.

Whatever the case is, as an important literary practice, the *Shenxian daohua ju* written by these frustrated literati has broken the Confucian maxim that “The Master would not discuss prodigies, prowess, lawlessness, or the supernatural” (子不語怪力亂神) (Zhu 2011, p. 95).<sup>25</sup> In this sense, this dramatic category brings a lot of imaginary and magnificent fiction to Chinese literature.

## 6. Conclusions

Firstly, if *Shenxian daohua ju* of the Yuan dynasty belongs to literary scope, it is unacceptable to degrade it as the embodiment or subsidiary of the Daoist teachings. At least from the view of modern literary critics, literary works that strictly serve a certain kind of ideology may not be good works. Then, they no longer belong to literature in the strict sense. This view should also apply to literature and religion in general.

Secondly, it is meaningful to interpret *Shenxian daohua ju* with the help of “aesthetic distinction”. From this perspective, the aesthetic characteristics of the *Shenxian daohua ju* will be highlighted, and these dramas can be regarded as irrelevant to Daoism. However, the requirement of interpreting these dramas under the pure aesthetic consciousness is still too harsh. It will lead to a neglect of the distinctive features of the *Shenxian daohua ju*.

Gadamer’s calling for a general hermeneutic view of the relationship between artwork and tradition has its justification. It inspires us to take *Shenxian daohua ju* as literary works and examine them within the tradition of Chinese poetics. Therefore, we should illuminate *Shenxian daohua ju* in the tradition it originates from rather than arbitrarily interpret or distort these dramatic works. Given the discussion so far, we can say with certainty that the *Shenxian daohua ju* of the Yuan dynasty is neither the embodiment of Daoist doctrines nor is it pure literary work that has nothing to do with Daoism. Its subtleties and nuances should generally be elucidated under the tradition of Chinese poetics.

**Author Contributions:** Conceptualization, J.T. and X.B.; methodology, J.T. and X.B.; investigation, J.T. and X.B.; resources, J.T. and X.B.; writing—original draft preparation, J.T. and X.B.; writing—review and editing, J.T. and X.B. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** Not applicable.

**Informed Consent Statement:** Not applicable.

**Data Availability Statement:** Not applicable.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> *Zaju* is a new dramatic genre that emerged in the latter half of the thirteenth century, literally miscellaneous comedy, and also known as *beiqu* (北曲, northern drama).
- <sup>2</sup> There are not many studies exploring the relationship between the *Shenxian daohua ju* and Daoism. See (Yao 1980; Idema and West 1982; Hou 1988; Inoue 2018). More studies on Daoism and its relationship with literature, art, and political power, please refer to (Wang 2000, 2011, 2012).
- <sup>3</sup> Some scholars consider *Taihe Zhengyin Pu* the earliest classification of Yuan *zaju* (West and Idema 2015, p. 202), which is improper.
- <sup>4</sup> The tablet (hu 笏) is used to be held by officials in front of their faces when meeting the emperor.
- <sup>5</sup> The analysis of classification refers to (Zhao 1990); the English translation refers to (Bazin 1838, pp. LVII–LVIII), with minor changes here.
- <sup>6</sup> The 19 works of *Shenxian daohua ju* are: *Lü Dongbin Gets Drunk Three Times in Yueyang Tower* (Lü Dongbin sanzui Yueyang Lou 呂洞賓三醉岳陽樓), *Gaining Enlightenment at Handan: The Dream of Yellow Millet* (Handan dao xingwu huangliang meng 邯鄲道省悟黃粱夢), *Chen Tuan Stays Aloof in the Taihua Mountain* (Taihuashan Chentuan gaowo 泰華山陳搏高臥), *Ma Danyang Thrice Leads Crazy Ren to Enlightenment* (Ma Danyang sandu Ren Fengzi 馬丹陽三度任風子), *Celestial Master Zhang cuts off Romance and Love* (Zhangtianshi duan fenghuaxueyue 張天師斷風花雪月), *At Shamen Island Student Zhang Brews up the Sea* (Shamen dao Zhang Sheng zhuhai 沙門島張生煮海), *Lü Dongbin Leads Iron Crutch Li to Enlightenment* (Lü Dongbin dutuo Tiegua Li 呂洞賓度鐵拐李岳), *Chen Jiqing is Enlightened to the Way on a Bamboo-leaf Boat* (Chen Jiqing wudao zhuye zhou 陳季卿悟道竹葉舟), *The Peach Blossom Lady Marries Zhougong By Breaking Down His Magic* (Taohuanü pofa jia Zhougong 桃花女破法嫁周公), *Daoist Master Sa Inquests the Green Peach Blossom at Night* (Sazhenren yeduan Bitaoxia 薩真人夜斷碧桃花), *Liu Chen and Ruan Zhao Stray into the Peach Blossom Land* (Liu Chen and Ruan Zhao Wuru Taoyuan 劉晨阮肇誤入桃源), *Lü Dongbin Thrice Leads the Willow South of the City to Enlightenment* (Lü Dongbin sandu chengnan liu 呂洞賓三度城南柳), *Ma Danyang Leads Head of the Guild Liu to Enlightenment* (Ma Danyang dutuo Liu Hangshou 馬丹陽度脫劉行首), *Iron Crutch Li Leads Golden Lad and Jade Lass to Enlightenment* (Tiegua Li du Jintong Yunü 鐵拐李度金童玉女), *Old Zhuang Zhou's One Dream of the Butterfly* (Lao Zhuang Zhou yizhen hudie meng 老莊周一枕蝴蝶夢), *Yan Ziling Fishing at Qili Beach* (Yan Ziling chuidiao Qili Tan 嚴子陵垂釣七里灘), *Cripple Li Yue: Poetry and Wine at the Wanjiang Pavilion* (Que Li Yue shijiu Wanjiang Ting 癩李岳詩酒翫江亭), *Zhongli of the Han Leads Lan Caihe to Enlightenment* (Han Zhongli dutuo Lan Caihe 漢鍾離度脫藍採和), *Lü Dongbin in Peach and Willow: A Dream of Ascending to Immortality* (Lü Dongbin taoliu shengxian meng 呂洞賓桃柳升仙夢). *Chen Jiqing wudao zhuye zhou* has two extant editions: the 14th century Yuan edition and the 16th century Ming edition. The discussion here in this article is based on the Ming edition included in *Yuanqu Xuan* (元曲選) compiled by Zang Maoxun in the 16th century. We need to pay special attention to *Lü Dongbin sandu chengnan liu*. It is identified as a drama written in the Ming dynasty by Wu Mei (Wu 2000, p. 139).
- <sup>7</sup> Some of the texts listed here have both Yuan editions and Ming editions. In this article, our discussion is based on the Ming editions because the Yuan editions are incomplete. The following five dramas: *Lao Zhuang Zhou yizhen hudie meng* 老莊周一枕蝴蝶夢, *Yan Ziling chuidiao Qili Tan* 嚴子陵垂釣七里灘, *Que Li Yue shijiu Wanjiang Ting* 癩李岳詩酒翫江亭, *Han Zhongli dutuo Lan Caihe* 漢鍾離度脫藍採和, and *Lü Dongbin taoliu shengxian meng* 呂洞賓桃柳升仙夢, are included in *Yuanqu Xuan Waibian* (Sui 1959); other texts are included in *Yuanqu Xuan* (Zang 1958). Some of the English titles refer to the translation of Stephen West and Wilt Idema (West and Idema 2015, pp. 202–3), but with minor changes.
- <sup>8</sup> *Fulu* is a Daoist spell and magic. It is believed that Daoist deities had decreed the ability to draw and write supernatural talismans (*Shenfu* 神符) to authorized Daoist priests. These talismans function as summons or instructions to deities and spirits, as exorcism tools, or as medical potions for ailments.
- <sup>9</sup> The practice of alchemy and inner cultivation to achieve immortality.
- <sup>10</sup> Ge Hong (葛洪, 283–363) divides the immortals into *tianxian* (天仙, celestial immortals), *dixian* (地仙, earthly immortals) and *shijiexian* (尸解仙). See (Ge 1980, p. 18). *Tianxian* and *dixian* are both immortalized with physical bodies, while *shijiexian* reaches immortality by means of a simulated corpse. The study on the immortalization method of *shijie*, see (Campany 2014).
- <sup>11</sup> More specifically, the Daoist scriptures and collections mentioned here are Wang Chongyang's *Chongyang Jiaohua Ji* 重陽教化集, Ma Danyang (馬丹陽, 1123–1183)'s *Danyang Shengguangcan* 丹陽神光燦, Dongxuan Jinyu Ji 洞玄金玉集, and Jianwu Ji 漸悟集, Wang Chuyi (王處一, 1142–1217)'s *Yunguang Ji* 雲光集, Qiu Chuji (丘處機, 1148–1227)'s *Panxi Ji* 磻溪集, Tan Chuduan (譚處端, 1123–1185)'s *Shuiyun Ji* 水雲集, Hao Datong (郝大通, 1140–1212)'s *Taigu Ji* 太古集, and Yin Zhiping (尹志平, 1169–1251)'s *Baoguang Ji* 葆光集. See (Wang 2007, pp. 27–28).
- <sup>12</sup> English translation refers to (Owen 1992, p. 40).
- <sup>13</sup> English translation refers to (Shih 1959, p. 32), with minor changes.
- <sup>14</sup> *Odes* means the *Shijing* (Book of Songs).
- <sup>15</sup> English translation refers to (Soothill 1910, p. 147).
- <sup>16</sup> English translations refer to (Wilhelm 1977, pp. 103, 112).
- <sup>17</sup> English translation refers to (Yen 1975, pp. 205–39). with minor changes.
- <sup>18</sup> English translation refers to (West and Idema 2015, p. 244).

- 19 English translation refers to (Mair 1990, p. 62 (18)).
- 20 English translation refers to (Giles 1889, p. 100), with minor changes.
- 21 English translation refers to (Soothill 1910, pp. 401–3), with minor changes.
- 22 English translation refers to (Owen 1992, p. 46).
- 23 English translation refers to (Legge 1895, p. 397).
- 24 English translation refers to (Legge 1895, p. 346).
- 25 English translation refers to (Soothill 1910, p. 353).

## References

- Bazin, Aîné. 1838. *Théâtre Chinois, Ou Choix De Pièces De Théâtre Composées Sous Les Empereurs Mongols*. Paris: Imprimerie Royale.
- Company, Robert F. 2014. The Sword Scripture: Recovering and Interpreting a Lost 4th-Century Daoist Method for Cheating Death. *Daoism: Religion, History & Society* 6: 33–84.
- Chen, Zizhan 陳子展. 1983. *Shijing Zhijie* (juan 1) 詩經直解(卷一). Shanghai: Fudan Daxue Chubanshe.
- Deng, Shaoji 鄧紹基. 1991. *Yuandai Wenxue Shi* 元代文學史. Beijing: Renmin Wenxue Chubanshe.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode (Gesammelte Werke 1)*. Tübingen: J.C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).
- Ge, Hong 葛洪. 1980. *Baopuzi Neipian Jiaoshi* 抱樸子內篇校釋. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju.
- Giles, Herbert A., trans. 1889. *Chuang Tzu, Mystic, Moralist, and Social Reformer*. London: Bernard Quarich.
- Hartz, Paula R. 2009. *Daoism*, 3rd ed. New York: Chelsea House.
- Hou, Guangfu 侯光復. 1988. Yuan qianqi qutan yu Quanzhenjiao 元前期曲壇與全真教. *Wenxue Yichan* 文學遺產 5: 85–93.
- Hsiao, Ch'i-ch'ing 蕭啓慶. 2008. *Yuandai de Zuqun Wenhua yu Keju* 元代的族群文化與科舉. Taipei: Lianjing Chuban Shiye Gufen Youxian Gongsi.
- Hu, Minghu 呼明虎. 1989. Yuandai de ruhu yu defang guanxue 元代的儒戶與地方官學. *Huadong Shifan Daxue Xuebao* 華東師範大學學報 1: 15–20.
- Idema, Wilt, and Stephen H. West. 1982. *Chinese Theater 1100–1450, A Source Book*. Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag.
- Inoue, Taizan 井上泰山. 2018. Yuan zaju de daoshi yu daogu: Yi qi xingge yu jue se wei zhongxin 元雜劇的道士與道姑——以其性格與角色為中心. In *Haineiwai Zhongguo Xiju Shijia Zixuanji: Takemura Noriyuki, Inoue Taizan and Ken Komatsu Juan* 海內外中國戲劇史家自選集 竹村則行 井上泰山 小松謙 卷. Zhengzhou: Daxiang Chubanshe, pp. 110–25.
- Jao, Tsung-I 饒宗頤. 1991. *Laozi Xiang'er Zhu Jiaozheng* 老子想爾註校證. Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe.
- Kirkland, Russell. 2004. *Taoism: The Enduring Tradition*. New York: Routledge.
- Kobayashi, Masayoshi. 2010. *Zhongguo de Daojiao* 中國的道教. Translated by Haoyue Wang 王皓月. Jinan: Qilu Shushe.
- Legge, James. 1895. *The Works of Mencius*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Liao, Tengye 廖藤葉. 2000. *Zhongguo Mengxi Yanjiu* 中國夢戲研究. Taipei: Xuesi Chubanshe.
- Liu, Xie 劉繩. 1989. *Wenxin Diaolong Yizheng* 文心雕龍義證. Annotated by Ying Zhan 詹瑛. Shanghai: ShanghaiGuji Chubanshe.
- Liu, Xingli 劉興利. 2014. Cong Yuanmo Mingchu shenxian daohau ju kan bei zaiju tizhi zhi xinbian: Yi Shengxian meng, Dubu daluotian and Huayue shenxianhui weili 從元末明初神仙道化劇看北雜劇體制之新變——以《升仙夢》《獨步大羅天》《花月神仙會》為例. *Sichuan Xiju* 四川戲劇 4: 113–16.
- Luo, Weiguo 羅衛國. 2014. *Fozang yu Daozang* 佛藏與道藏. Shanghai: Shanghai Shudian Chubanshe.
- Mair, Victor H., trans. 1990. *Tao Te Ching: The Classic Book of Integrity and the Way*. New York: Bantam Books.
- Owen, Stephen. 1992. *Readings in Chinese Literary thought*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Qiu, Shusen 邱樹森. 1999. *Yuanchao Jianshi* 元朝簡史. Fuzhou: Fujian Renmin Chubanshe.
- Qu, Liwei 曲麗偉. 2017. “Yuankan Zaju Sanshi Zhong” Fuzi Cihui Yanjiu 《元刊雜劇三十種》復字詞彙研究. Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Chubanshe.
- Ren, Jiyu 任繼愈. 1990. *Zhongguo Daojiao Shi* 中國道教史. Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe.
- Ridgeway, William. 1915. *The Dramas and Dramatic Dances of Non-European Races*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Shih, Vincent Yu-chung, trans. 1959. *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons by Liu Hsieh*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Soothill, William Edward. 1910. *The Analects of Confucius*. Yokohama: Fukuio Printing Company, Ltd.
- Sui, Shusen 隋樹森. 1959. *Yuanqu Xuan Waibian* 元曲選外編. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju.
- Wang, Bi 王弼注. 2008. *Laozi Daodejing Zhu Jiaoshi* 老子道德經注校釋. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju.
- Wang, Chongyang 王重陽. 2005. *Wang Chongyang Ji* 王重陽集. Jinan: Qilu Shushe.
- Wang, Guowei 王國維. 2010. *Song Yuan Xiqu Shi* 宋元戲曲史. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju.
- Wang, Hanmin 王漢民. 2007. *Daojiao Shenxian Xiqu Yanjiu* 道教神仙戲曲研究. Beijing: Renmin Wenxue Chubanshe.
- Wang, Jinping. 2013. ‘Confucian Student’ and ‘Daoist Master’: Scholarly Daoists in Quanzhen Daoist Communities during the Jin-Yuan Transition. *Xin Shixue (New History)* 4: 55–92.
- Wang, Linda Greenhouse. 1992. A Study of Ma Chih-Yuan’s San Ch’u and Tsa Chu Lyrics. Ph.D. thesis, University of California, Berkeley, San Francisco, CA, USA.
- Wang, Richard G. 2000. Four Steles at the Monastery of Sublime Mystery (Xuanmiao guan): A Study of Daoism and Society on the Ming Frontier. *Asia Major* 2: 37–82.
- Wang, Richard G. 2012. *The Ming Prince and Daoism: Institutional Patronage of an Elite*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Wang, Richard G. 2011. *Ming Erotic Novellas: Genre, Consumption, and Religiosity in Cultural Practice*. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press.
- Wang, Yawei 王亞偉. 2018. Quanzhen dao yu Ma Zhiyuan shenxian daohua ju de qingjie jiangou 全真道與馬致遠神仙道化劇的情節建構. *Zhongnan Daxue Xuebao (Shehui Kexue Ban)* 中南大學學報(社會科學版) 1: 183–88.
- Wen, Haiqing 溫海清. 2018. *Cong Youmu Buluo dao Shijiexing Diguo: Yuan* 從游牧部落到世界性帝國 元. Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe.
- West, Stephen H., and Wilt L. Idema. 2015. *The Orphan of Zhao and other Yuan Plays*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Wilhelm, Richard. 1977. *The I Ching or Book of Changes*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Wu, Guangzheng 吳光正. 2008. Shilun Yuan Ming shenxian daohua ju de zongjiao yiyun 試論元明神仙道化劇的宗教意蘊. *Changjiang Xueshu* 長江學術 1: 63–67.
- Wu, Mei 吳梅. 2000. *Zhongguo Xiqu Gailun* 中國戲曲概論. Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe.
- Xia, Tingzhi 夏庭芝. 1959. Qinglou Ji 青樓集. In *Zhongguo Gudian Xiqu Lunzhu Jicheng*, Vol. 2 中國古典戲曲論著集成(第二卷). Translated by Zhongguo Xiqu Yanjiu Yuan 中國戲曲研究院. Beijing: Zhongguo Xiqu Chubanshe.
- Yang, Bojun 楊伯峻, and Fengbin Yang 楊逢彬. 2019. *Mengzi* 孟子. Changsha: Yuelu Shushe.
- Yang, Yi 楊毅. 2008. Nüxing chongbai dui Yuandai shenxian daohua ju de yingxiang 女性崇拜對元代神仙道化劇的影響. *Xiju Wenxue* 戲劇文學 6: 70–73.
- Yao, Shuyi 書儀. 1980. Yuan zaju zhong de 'Shenxian daohua' xi 元雜劇中的“神仙道化”戲. *Wenxue Yichan* 文學遺產 3: 64–73.
- Yen, Yuan-Shu. 1975. Yellow Millet Dream: A Translation. *Tamkang Review* 6: 205–39.
- You, Guo'en 遊國恩. 1964. *Zhongguo Wenxue Shi (di san ce)* 中國文學史(第三冊). Beijing: Renmin Wenxue Chubanshe.
- Yu, Laiming 余來明. 2013. *Yuandai Keju yu Wenxue* 元代科舉與文學. Wuhan: Wuhan Daxue Chubanshe.
- Yu, Qiuyu 余秋雨. 1985. *Zhongguo Xiju Wenhua Shi Shu* 中國戲劇文化史述. Changsha: Hunan Renmin Chubanshe.
- Yu, Shiao-Ling. 1988. Taoist Themes in Yuan Drama (with Emphasis on the plays of MA CHIH-YUAN). *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 2: 123–49. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Zang, Jinshu 臧晉叔. 1958. *Yuanqu Xuan* 元曲選. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju.
- Zeng, Yongyi 曾永義. 2008. *Xiqu Yuanliu Xinlun* 戲曲源流新論. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju.
- Zhang, Dainian 張岱年. 1988. *Wenhua yu Zhexue* 文化與哲學. Beijing: Jiaoyu Kexue Chubanshe.
- Zhang, Daxin 張大新. 2009. Xianshi de shiluo yu jietuo de kunhuo: Ma Zhiyuan zuopin zhuti yishi de wenhua xinli toushi 現實的失落與解脫的困惑——馬致遠作品主體意識的文化心理透視. *Wenxue Yichan* 文學遺產 3: 89–96.
- Zhao, Shanlin 趙山林. 1990. Lun Yuan zaju de fenlei yanjiu 論元雜劇的分類研究. *Hebei Xuekan* 河北學刊 5: 87–91.
- Zheng, Li 鄭莉. 2008. Ming neiting shenxian ju yanjiu 明內廷神仙劇研究. *Neimenggu Shehui Kexue (Hanwen Ban)* 內蒙古社會科學(漢文版) 1: 152–156.
- Zhu, Quan 朱權. 1959. Taihe Zhengyin Pu 太和正音譜. In *Zhongguo Gudian Xiqu Lunzhu Jicheng*, Vol. 3 中國古典戲曲論著集成(第三卷). Translated by Zhongguo Xiqu Yanjiu Yuan 中國戲曲研究院. Beijing: Zhongguo Xiqu Chubanshe.
- Zhu, Xi 朱熹. 2011. *Sishu Zhangju Jizhu* 四書章句集註. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju.
- Zhu, Ziqing 朱自清. 1990. *Shiyanzhi Bian* 詩言志辨. In *Zhu Ziqing Quanji* 朱自清全集. Nanjing: Jiangsu Jiaoyu Chubanshe.
- Zhuang, Zi 莊子. 1983. *Zhuangzi Jinzhu Jinyi* 莊子今註今譯. Annotated by Guying Chen 陳鼓應. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju.