Abstract

Nan Xi (南戏), or Southern drama, was the prevalent theatrical form of late Southern Song (1127 - 1279) and early Yuan (1279 - 1368). Like other traditional Chinese dramas, Nan Xi is a kind of opera consisting of singing, action and dialogue parts. This study aims to critically review the narrative structure, musical arrangements, performance contexts and other performing aspects of Zhang Xie Zhuang Yuan (张协状元), which is one of the earliest Nan Xi plays.

In this academic exercise, efforts will be made to trace the development of the betrayal theme in Chinese dramas and concludes with a comparison of Zhang Xie Zhuang Yuan and Pipa Ji (琵琶记), which also portrays a betrayal theme with a happy ending. This study reveals that Zhang Xie Zhuang Yuan has preserved many characteristic features of Nan Xi and has influenced the development of later theatrical forms.