ABSTRACT

The history of theatrical performance is a new area for the research on Chinese drama. This Academic Exercise attempts to examine the theatrical performances and other related facts of the early Qing era (1644 - 1795) through studying the theatrical scenes portrayed in the three Chinese full-length novels, namely, Dream of the Red Chamber (Hong Lou Meng 《红楼梦》), A Lamp at Diverging Paths (Qilu Deng 《歧路灯》) and The Scholars (Rulin Waishi 《儒林外史》). Theatrical records found in other Chinese literary works are also used as supporting evidences.

The study shows that theatre going is a common practice among the early Qing Chinese, Private and Commercial troupes being the main forces contributing to the development of drama in this period. Performances are staged in private houses, temples, public squares, restaurants, theatres and club-houses on the occasions such as birthdays, festive celebrations, thanksgiving to gods, and even funerals. Audience attend these performances are not only for leisure, but also to socialize. Finally, The choices of items
(jumu 剧目) and styles of drama (shengqiang 声腔) depend on the changing performance contexts. To a great extent, the theatrical facts of the novels reflect the performing and social realities of the early Qing.