ABSTRACT

_Xiqu_ (戏曲), which means “theatre of song”, is one of the branches of Classical Chinese literature. The earliest form of _xiqu_ is _nanxi_ (南戏) which literally means “southern theatre”. _Nanxi_ had vanished more than four hundred years ago but it was rediscovered in this century. As a result, there is a major breakthrough in the study of _xiqu_.

The purpose of this honours thesis is to study the evolution of the theatrical form of _nanxi_ through the comparison of two original _nanxi_ scripts, namely _Zhang Xie Zhuang Yuan_ (张协状元) of the southern Song period and _Pi Pa Ji_ (琵琶记) of the Yuan Dynasty. First, the thesis examines the evolution of the structure of _nanxi_. Then, it provides an analysis on the role category system of _nanxi_ so as to gain an insight into how the workload is distributed on the stage during performances.

There are a few findings for this study. First, due to more advanced printing technology, _Pi Pa Ji_ has a more informative _ti mu_ (题目). Second, there is an increase of about 40% in the number of songs in _Pi Pa Ji_. Third, _Zhang Xie Zhuang Yuan_ uses _Zhu Gong Diao_ (诸宫调) in the first scene to provide a summary of the story while _Pi Pa Ji_ only uses two pieces of _ci_ (词) to do so. Last, from _Zhang Xie Zhuang Yuan_ to _Pi Pa Ji_, _nanxi_ had evolved from the predominance of the individual performances of _sheng_ (生) and _dan_ (旦) to a teamwork effort involving all performers on the stage.