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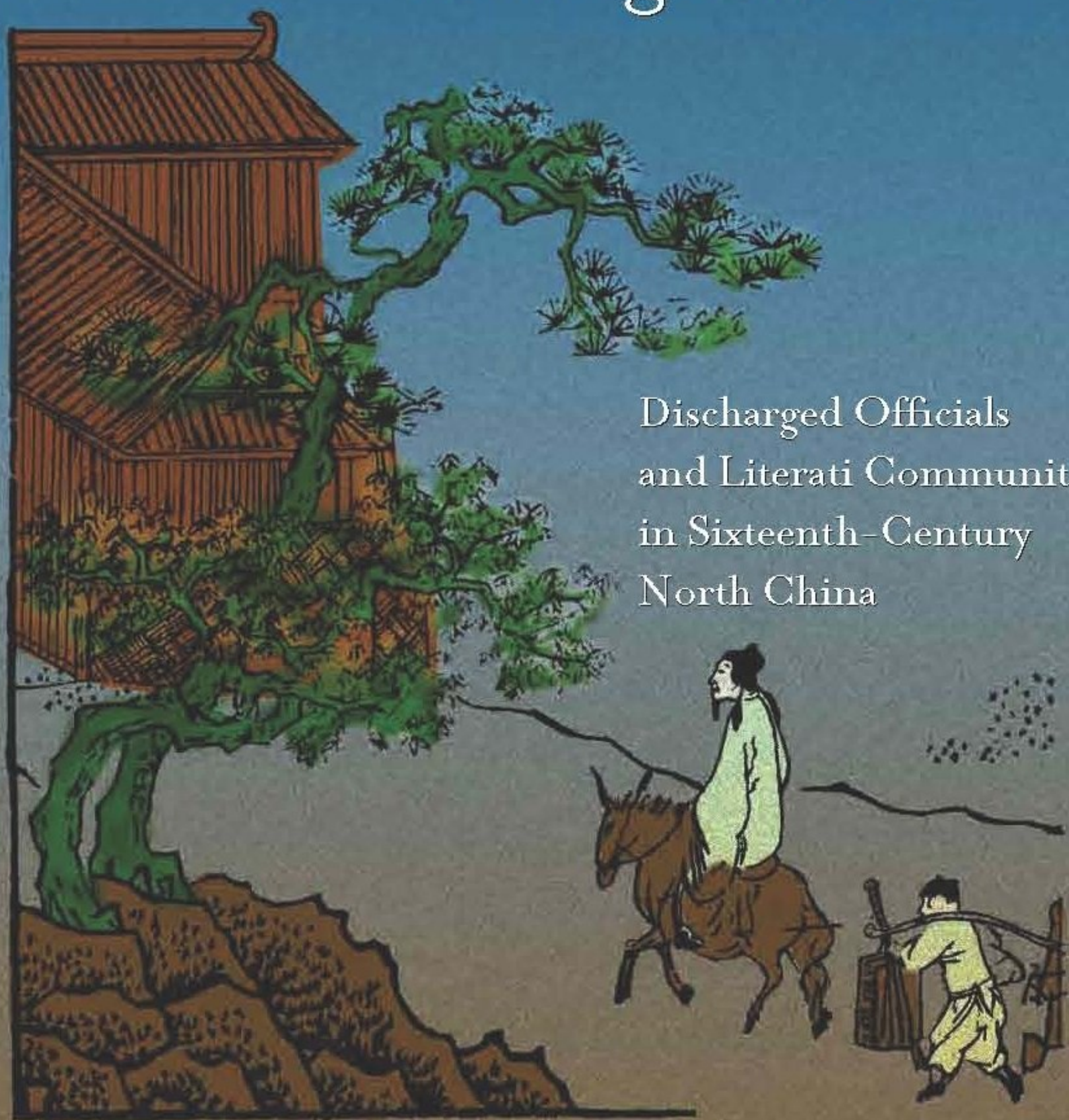
Songs of Contentment
and Transgression

Discharged Officials
and Literati Communities
in Sixteenth-Century North China



Harvard
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Asia Center

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Abbreviations

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DMB	L. Carrington Goodrich and Chaoying Fang, <i>Dictionary of Ming Biography</i>
GDYXCQ	Li Kaixian, <i>Gaiding Yuanxian chuanqi</i> 改定元賢傳奇
HXSRCDL	Sishi Mu, comp., <i>Huxi shanren chudulu</i> 許西山人初度錄
KDSXSJ	Kang Hai, <i>Kang Duishan xiansheng ji</i> 康對山先生集
LKXQJ	Li Kaixian, <i>Li Kaixian quanji</i> 李開先全集
MPWTS	Wang Jiushi, <i>Chongkan Meipi Wang taishi xiansheng quanji</i> 重刊羨陂王太史先生全集
PDYF	Kang Hai, <i>Pandong yuefu</i> 汧東樂府
PDYFHL	Kang Hai, <i>Pandong yuefu houlu</i> 汧東樂府後錄
QMSQ	Xie Boyang, ed., <i>Quan Ming sanqu</i> 全明散曲
QYSQ	Sui Shusen, ed., <i>Quan Yuan sanqu</i> 全元散曲
SKQS	Siku quanshu 四庫全書
SKCM	Siku quanshu cunmu congshu 四庫全書存目叢書

SKCMBB	Siku quanshu cunmu congshu bubian 四庫全書存目 叢書補編
WLQZLZ	Kang Hai, <i>Wang Lanqing zhenlie zhuan</i> 王蘭卿真[貞] 烈傳
XXSKQS	Xuxiu Siku quanshu 續修四庫全書
YHYSKQ	Lu Qian, ed., <i>Yinhongyi suo ke qu</i> 飲虹簃所刻曲
ZGGDXQ	<i>Zhongguo gudian xiqu lunzhu jicheng</i> 中國古典戲曲論著 集成

Introduction

Leaving the Center

Jingfu [xi of Wang Jiusi] and Dehan [xi of Kang Hai] were from the same area, served in the same office, and were both cashiered as members of Liu Jin's clique. Traveling between Pandong and Hu county, they visited each other and had conversations over banquets. They sought out songs and also composed tunes to amuse each other.

敬夫、德涵，同里同官，同以瑾黨放逐，汧東、鄠杜之間，相與過從談讌，徵歌度曲，以相娛樂。¹

[Li Kaixian] was promoted to the vice minister of the Court of Imperial Sacrifices. Because of a fire in the Imperial Ancestral Temple, he submitted his resignation [in accordance with the common practice], but he was actually dismissed. Upon his return to his native place, Li put the fields and estates in order. He kept singers, seeking out songs and also composing *qu* himself; he wrote songs to new tunes, plucking stringed instruments and singing without restraints. He was confident that even Ma Zhiyuan and Zhang Kejiu could not surpass him.

[李開先]已遷太常，會九廟災，上疏自陳，竟罷歸。歸而治田產，蓄聲妓，徵歌度曲，爲新聲小令，搗彈放歌，自謂馬東籬、張小山無以過也。²

1. Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan*, "Wang Shouzhou Jiusi" 王壽州九思, 314–15.

2. Ibid., "Li Shaoqing Kaixian" 李少卿開先, 377.

Officials in mid-Ming China discharged from their positions, whether through dismissal or forced retirement, faced a major turning point in their lives. From being at the center of society and enjoying a certain status, they found themselves suddenly displaced from the conventional path of success for a Chinese literatus. Where would they go and what would they do? How would they live out the rest of their lives? What pursuits would they choose?

In this book I explore the paths of three officials, Wang Jiushi 王九思 (1468–1551), Kang Hai 康海 (1475–1541), and Li Kaixian 李開先 (1502–68), who in their estrangement from officialdom and politics, sought solace and contentment in literary endeavors. Their endeavors, however, diverged from the more formal writing expected of scholar-officials. This is a book about alternative literary paths and those who chose them.

The lives of these three literati share certain similarities. All three were once scholar-officials who had been successful in the imperial examinations (Kang Hai was even the top graduate) and been appointed to significant official posts but were later dismissed or forced to retire to their home villages for the remainder of their lives: 27 years in Li's case, 30 in Kang's, and 40 in Wang's. In the prime of their lives, these men were suddenly displaced from the political center and diverted from the conventional path of success for a Chinese literatus. In retirement, all engaged actively in writing drama and songs in the *qu* 曲 genre.

The term *qu* literally means “songs,” and in traditional terminology as used and understood in the Ming dynasty (1368–1644),³ it refers to both *sanqu* 散曲⁴ (literally, “dispersed or individual songs”), a kind of song verse in Chinese literature, and *juqu* 劇曲 (drama, also now commonly designated as *xiqu* 戲曲).⁵ In this study, I follow this convention

3. Li Changji, *Zhongguo gudai quxue shi*, 47. In addition, in *qu* anthologies, the differentiation between *sanqu* and drama became more distinct only in the Wanli (1573–1620) period; see Zhu Chongzhi, *Zhongguo gudai xiqu xuanben yanjin*, 15.

4. Ming writers also often referred to their *sanqu* writings as *ci* 詞 or *yuefu* 樂府.

5. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Wang Guowei 王國維 (1877–1927) used the term *xiqu* for his seminal study of the history of Chinese drama. As Patricia Sieber (*Theaters of Desire*, 22–24) has pointed out, this was “a significantly modern and highly influential linguistic choice.” Wang’s coinage was most likely related to the Japanese concept of *gikyoku* (itself a loanword from classical Chinese and written with the same Chinese characters as *xiqu*) and quickly became diffused into Republican-era parlance.

and use the term *qu* to designate song and drama. I also call all literati who participated in the writing of *sanqu* or drama “*qu* writers.”

Why did these three literati choose to pursue the *qu* genre? *Qu* was certainly not the most natural literary genre for a traditional Chinese scholar. Unlike the more formal genres such as prose or *shi* poetry that every Chinese literatus was expected to write, *sanqu* and drama were often regarded as “pastimes” unworthy of the literati’s attention. They thus suffered from a lower status compared to high and serious genres such as poetry and prose. The mid-Ming literatus He Liangjun 何良俊 (1506–73), a contemporary of Li Kaixian, once pointed out that scholar-officials felt ashamed to pay attention to lyrics and *qu*.⁶ Furthermore, *qu* rarely appeared in the literary collection (*wenji* 文集) of a Chinese writer, an absence that implies *qu* was not regarded as part of one’s standard literary corpus. This tells us much about the marginal status of the genre.⁷

This book traces a connection between a disappointing end to an official career and the embrace of *qu*, between a physical move away from the center and the pursuit of a marginalized literary genre. Wang, Kang, and Li did not write a few songs. Each wrote hundreds of *sanqu* songs and a number of plays, discussed in detail in the chapters that follow. In fact, from the 1510s to 1560s, these three literati became the major *qu* writers in north China. Wang Shizhen’s 王世貞 (1526–90) later remark “Among the northerners, since Wang Jiusi and Kang Hai, one has to mention Li Bohua [子 of Li Kaixian] from Shandong 北人自王、康后，推山東李伯華”⁸ indicates the renown of this trio.

However, along with fame, their attention to such a marginalized genre as song and drama also attracted criticism, especially concerning their lifestyles. For a literatus, the proper path of study and conduct was Confucian learning and statecraft. It was definitely not writing lyrics, songs, or plays. Consider, for example, the reception Kang Hai received from his contemporaries, as described in Li Kaixian’s biography of him:

6. He Liangjun, *Qulun*, 6.

7. One may compare this to the analogous status of the *ci* lyric in the Northern Song; see Egan, “The Problem of the Repute of *Ci*,” and his more recent *The Problem of Beauty*, esp. 241–50.

8. Wang Shizhen (1526–90), *Quzao*, 36.

“For whenever [Kang Hai] drank, he was always accompanied by singsong girls; wherever there were singsong girls, there would be songs, and whenever there were songs, they were always written by himself; thus his contemporaries criticized him for being too unrestrained” 或又以其酒必妓，妓必歌，歌必自製，病其太放。⁹ Literati society envisioned the world of *qu* as limited to wine, music, and singsong girls and looked down on it. The disparagement of *qu* reached new heights in the eighteenth century, exemplified in statements by the editors of *Mingshi* 明史 (Standard history of the Ming dynasty) and *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書 (Complete collection of the four treasures).¹⁰ Kang Hai was heavily criticized for his “indulgence” in these genres:

In order to save Li Mengyang, Kang Hai lost his integrity through association with Liu Jin. As Liu Jin fell from power, Kang Hai was punished [as an accomplice] and was dismissed. Thereafter, he became completely given to sensual pleasures without any restraint, calling for singers and gathering singsong girls around him. He no longer devoted his attention to essays and prose, and his poetry became most depraved and unruly.

海以救李夢陽故失身劉瑾，瑾敗坐廢，遂放浪自恣，徵歌選妓，於文章不復精思，詩尤頹縱。¹¹

In this account, Kang Hai adopted a decadent and unrestrained lifestyle following his dismissal from office, forsaking the more “proper” genres such as prose and poetry and indulging in “wine, women, and songs.” Sometimes it was even implied that a wanton lifestyle was “essential” for one to excel in the *qu* genre:

Kang Hai, in his late years, indulged his passions among singsong girls and *therefore* [italics added] he excelled in *yuefu* [i.e., *sanqu*]. He did not pay much at-

9. Li Kaixian, “Duishan Kang xiuzhuan zhuan” 對山康修撰傳, *LKXQJ*, 762.

10. This was most clearly shown in the disparaging assessment of the *qu* genre by the eighteenth-century compilers of the catalog of the imperial library at the head of the section devoted to lyrics and arias (*ciqu* 詞曲), in Yong Rong et al., *Siku quanshu zongmu*, 198.1807: “*Ci* and *qu* are two genres that are between literature and professional skills. They are of a rather inferior grade and are not highly regarded by writers. It is just the ‘clever’ literati who compete with one another using such extravagant phrases” 詞、曲二體，在文章、技藝之間，厥品頗卑，作者弗貴，特才華之士，以綺語相高耳。

11. Ibid., 171.1499.

tention to his poetry and prose. Hence, his sharpness [in *qu*] and bluntness [in poetry and prose] could not but show against each other.

海晚歲縱情聲伎，故樂府特爲擅長。詩文皆不甚留意，不免利鈍互陳。¹²

Also implied in these two remarks is that writing *qu* might affect one's talent in other genres and damage the ability of a literatus like Kang Hai to engage in “serious” writing. According to some critics, the harm of writing *qu* went beyond that. This is what the editors of *Mingshi* said about the lifestyles of Kang Hai and Wang Jiusi following their dismissals:

Whenever they gathered in Pandong or Hu county, they brought along singsong girls and drank rapturously. They created music and produced songs, comparing themselves to actors, so as to give expression to their frustration and sorrow. Wang Jiusi once paid a huge sum in acquiring musicians in order to learn to play the *pipa*, and Kang Hai was especially apt in plucking string instruments. Later, people spread stories about them and followed their example. The way of great elegance and refinement indeed declined.

每相聚洪東、鄆杜間，挾聲伎酣飲，製樂造歌曲，自比俳優，以寄其悵鬱。九思嘗費重貲購樂工學琵琶。海搗彈尤善。後人傳相倣效，大雅之道微矣。¹³

Music, wine, and singsong girls were not appropriate companions for a serious gentleman. Hence, in the eyes of the editors of *Mingshi*, the writing of *qu* became a “harmful” and abhorrent act because followers of Wang and Kang imitated not only their literary styles but also their lifestyles, which certainly did not follow the path of proper conduct.

A stigma was clearly attached to these genres both during and after the mid-Ming partly because the ambience of *qu* writing often involved singsong girls, wine, and sensual pleasures. Wang, Kang, and Li did not write *qu* for profit in the commercial theater or for court performances under imperial patronage. In other words, they were not writing for a living. If these literati were aware of negative comments about their involvement in *qu* activities—and in the following chapters I show that

12. Ibid., 176.1567.

13. Zhang Tingyu et al., *Mingshi*, 286.7349.

they were—why did they still participate in this genre, and how did they themselves perceive the writing of *qu*?

We have to consider carefully the relation between the forced retirement of Wang, Kang, and Li and their conspicuous involvement in *qu* writing. Two imperial kinsmen, Zhu Youdun 朱有燾 (1379–1439) and his uncle Zhu Quan 朱權 (1378–1448), were similarly involved in *qu*, but their adoption of the genre might be seen as a self-protective means of demonstrating their lack of interest in politics in order to survive the power struggles within the imperial family.¹⁴

The literati writers presented in this book, however, faced a different situation. Suddenly displaced from official life, they were more concerned with finding a new channel for their old ambitions rather than hiding them like the royal playwrights. How did *qu* writing, perhaps even simply the act of taking up such a genre and the decadent lifestyle associated with it, serve the needs of these rejected literati in the first half of the sixteenth century? To begin to answer this question, we must first examine the place of *qu* writing in the Ming period.

Qu in Mid-Ming and North China

Recent years have seen a growing awareness of the lack of scholarship on early Ming literature, which is no less interesting and significant than the literature of the well-researched late Ming period.¹⁵ For the field of *qu* studies, the mid-Ming, roughly 1450–1550, is especially important for understanding the development of song and drama. This was the period that witnessed a revival in *qu* writing.

The Yuan dynasty (1260–1368) is often regarded as the golden age of *qu*. A number of late Yuan *qu* writers continued to be active in the early decades of the Ming dynasty,¹⁶ but whereas *qu* thrived during the Yuan

14. Idema, *The Dramatic Oeuvre of Chu Yu-tun*, 18.

15. This point is underlined in Kang-i Sun Chang's chapter on early and mid-Ming literature in the forthcoming *The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature*. Daniel Bryant's recently published *The Great Recreation: Ho Ching-ming (1483–1521) and His World* is a significant contribution and redresses the neglect in scholarship on poetry of the mid-Ming. In his preface, Bryant points out "how relatively little has been written about the period and the people with whom this book is concerned" (xvi–xvii).

16. See, e.g., the sixteen *qu* writers listed in Zhu Quan, *Taibei zhengyin pu*, 22–23.

dynasty in commercial theaters and urban centers and appears to have been enjoyed by people of all classes, in the early Ming the genre was largely associated with regional courts and the two capitals in Beijing and Nanjing. For example, writers such as Tang Shi 湯式 (fl. 1383), Yang Ne 楊訥 (fl. 1402), and Jia Zhongming 賈仲明 (1343–1422) enjoyed the patronage of the Yongle emperor (r. 1402–24) when he was still the Prince of Yan in Beijing.¹⁷ Furthermore, the most prolific and important *qu* writer in the first half of the fifteenth century was Zhu Youdun, the Exemplary Prince of Zhou in Kaifeng. The next few decades of *qu* activities continued to be dominated by court writers and performers writing and producing songs and dramas for palace entertainment and consumption. The early Ming was an age of anonymous *qu* writing in which few writers of songs and dramas were known.

It was not until the mid-Ming that a new generation of *qu* writers broke through this anonymity. Interestingly, their emergence was a distinctively local phenomenon; for example, in Nanjing, with Chen Duo 陳鐸 (1454?–1507?) and Xu Lin 徐霖 (1462–1538)¹⁸; in Suzhou, with writers such as Tang Yin 唐寅 (1470–1523); and in Yunnan, with Yang Shen 楊慎 (1488–1559). This marked the transition from the court to the private realm as the site of *qu* production. At this time, more literati writers came to be associated with the *qu* genre.

This was the vibrant literary world inhabited by our three discharged officials, Wang Jiusi, Kang Hai, and Li Kaixian. My approach to exploring song and drama in a particular region is informed by the emergence of local centers of *qu* production during the mid-Ming. Although I begin with a discussion of these three major *qu* writers, I show that they did not create their worlds of song and drama as solitary outcasts. More literati were involved in these writing activities than literary histories have suggested. Hence, in exploring the worlds of these three writers, Kang and Wang in Shaanxi and Li in Shandong, we are moving toward uncovering two local centers of *qu* production surrounding these literati.

This book is the first attempt to sketch the rich literary landscape of mid-Ming north China, a world still largely unknown to us. Previous

17. *Luguibu xubian*, 283–84, 292. See also Idema, *The Dramatic Oeuvre of Chu Yu-tun*, 210–33.

18. See Tian Yuan Tan, “Emerging from Anonymity.”

studies have observed that the period from the late fifteenth to the first half of the sixteenth century witnessed the rise of southern *chuanqi* 傳奇 drama and the decline of northern *zaju* 雜劇 drama. As a result, for a long time, the development of Chinese drama in the second half of the Ming dynasty has often conveniently been represented by the rise of the southern *chuanqi* in south China in standard literary historical accounts. By contrast, little has been written about the theatrical world in north China. This gap is well illustrated in Xu Shuofang's 徐朔方 important work on Ming playwrights, *Wan Ming qujia nianpu* 晚明曲家年譜 (Chronological biographies of late Ming *qu* writers). Xu's work covers *qu* writers active from 1522 to 1644 and even includes some born as early as 1462. However, all of the biographies are from southern China, specifically from three southern regions considered the most "representative" of the late Ming period, which produced the greatest number of *qu* writers.¹⁹ Northern *qu* writers have been left out. In a similar fashion, previous studies on *sanqu* songs have focused on the Yuan dynasty, often regarded as the golden age of *sanqu*.²⁰ We face an even larger gap in this field in Western scholarship. Almost all previous studies on and translations of *sanqu* deal only with Yuan *sanqu*.²¹ To rediscover such an unexplored literary world, it is essential not only to look at major writers like Kang, Wang, and Li but also to draw into our discussion other *qu* writers surrounding these figures who have been overlooked and are invisible in literary histories.

19. The three volumes of Xu Shuofang, *Wan Ming qujia nianpu*, are devoted to Suzhou 蘇州, Zhejiang 浙江, and Wan'gan 皖贛 (i.e., Anhui, Jiangxi), respectively.

20. He Guichu's index to *sanqu* studies, *Yuan Ming Qing sanqu lunzhu suoyin*, makes it clear that previous scholarship is overwhelming on Yuan *sanqu*. Not until 2007 was a monograph on the developments of *sanqu* after the Yuan dynasty published; see Zhao Yishan, *Ming Qing sanqu shi*.

21. See, e.g., Crump, *Songs from Xanadu*; idem, *Song-Poems from Xanadu*; Radtke, *Poetry of the Yuan Dynasty*; Richard F. S. Yang and Metzger, *Fifty Songs from the Yuan*; and Schlepp, *San-ch'ü*. In *The Columbia History of Chinese Literature*, the genre of *sanqu* is discussed only under the chapter on Yuan dynasty *sanqu*; *sanqu* developments in the Ming dynasty are summarized in a few lines in the concluding paragraph of the chapter; see Schlepp, "Yüan San-ch'ü."

Major Writers and Their Communities

When we speak of writers in the Ming dynasty, the names that immediately come to mind—for example, the Former and Later Seven Masters, the Gong'an and Jingling schools—betray the general practice of considering writers in relation to the literary circles to which they belonged.²² A writer might live, work, and write in multiple and sometimes overlapping literary circles. Wang Jiusi and Kang Hai are often referred to as members of the famous “Former Seven Masters” (*Qian qi zǐ* 前七子), and Li Kaixian is well known as one of the “Eight Talents of the Jiajing Period (1522–67)” (*Jiajing ba caizi* 嘉靖八才子). These literary circles were based on the poetry and prose or shared literary ideals of their members. But Kang Hai, Wang Jiusi, and Li Kaixian did not write poetry or prose exclusively and are perhaps even more renowned for their *sanqu* and drama.

It is interesting to note that these three literati did not write primarily *sanqu* and drama in the literary circles of the Seven Masters or the Eight Talents. With whom and to whom, then, did they write *sanqu* songs and drama? The modern *sanqu* anthologies often select works of theirs that portray them as “individual” writers and exclude their “social” pieces. If we go beyond these representative pieces, we learn that Wang, Kang, and Li, in writing *qu*, were not isolated authors working on their own, nor did they write only to one another. Rather, surrounding these three *qu* masters were other literati who also participated in *qu* activities.

This book adopts a new approach to the study of these dramatists and *sanqu* writers in Chinese literary history. I study Wang Jiusi, Kang Hai, and Li Kaixian not as solitary writers but as signposts to less visible

22. In studying literary groups in the Ming dynasty, one must mention Guo Shaoyu's “Mingdai de wenren jituan.” For more recent studies of literati groups during the late Ming to early Qing dynasty, see He Zongmei, *Mingmo Qingchu wenren jieshe yanjiu*, esp. 17–70; and Li Shenghua, *Wan Ming shige yanjiu*, which studies the different poetry “schools” and clubs in the late Ming. For a more general study of literary groups in Chinese literary history, see Guo Yingde, *Zhongguo gudai wenren jituan yu wenxue fengmao*. Studies on literary circles in other periods include Hu Dalei, *Zhongguo wenxue jituan*; Jia Jinhua, *Tangdai jibui zongji yu shiren qunti yanjiu*; Ouyang Guang, *Song Yuan shishe yanjiu congkao*; and Xie Zhengguang, *Qingchu shiben yu shiren jiaoyou kao*. For a more general study of societies in Chinese culture, see Chen Baoliang, *Zhongguo de she yu hui*.

participants in the genre, signposts that give us access to the entire world of *sanqu* and drama among the literati. In many ways, these discharged officials were cultural leaders in their native regions. I consider them major *qu* writers, not only because of their skills and knowledge of the genre, but also because of their social status and wealth, which established them as central figures in their individual *qu* circles.

The songs and dramas of Wang, Kang, and Li are especially useful and attractive for a study of this nature. They preserve rich information on the context in which *qu* writing was undertaken, including by whom and to whom *qu* writings were composed and also the occasions on which they were produced.²³ Hence, we can explore the range of *qu* activities and the number of participants by examining their *qu* writings.

I use “*qu* writings” to refer to all writings related to the various modes of *qu* production, transmission, and reception.²⁴ The emphasis is not only on the contents of these songs and dramas but also on their social context. I focus on drama and *sanqu* compositions, compilations, and anthologies and pay attention to all the related prefaces (*xu* 序), colophons (*ba* 跋), and any other materials that contain information on the context of *qu* activities.

In collecting such *qu* writings, I have made a conscious effort to consult original Ming and Qing printed editions and hand-copied manuscripts, instead of relying on modern editions, collections, and anthologies, for two reasons. First, modern anthologies and collections of drama and *sanqu* in the Ming dynasty are inadequate. For example, the five-volume *Quan Ming sanqu* 全明散曲 (A collection of *sanqu* in the entire Ming dynasty) is an indispensable reference work for the study of Ming dynasty *sanqu*, but it is not a complete collection of the *sanqu* produced in the Ming dynasty. By returning to the original sources used in this study, one can discover many more *sanqu* writers and writings in the various printed editions and manuscripts of *qu* writings. (For a list of such previously unknown, “new” *qu* writers and their *qu* writings, see

23. Such information is similar to what Lauro Martines has called “direct reference” in his quest for the connection between English Renaissance verse and its social world; see Martines, *Society and History in English Renaissance Verse*, 20–21.

24. For a list of all *qu* writings discussed in this study, with bibliographic details on their various editions, see the Appendix.

the Appendix.)²⁵ Second, although modern critical editions are often neater and tidier, important information about the context of each printing and edition is sometimes omitted, probably because the editors considered such materials “unliterary” and irrelevant.

We rarely find among other mid-Ming literati, at least in their extant writings, such relatively well documented, interconnected groups collectively participating in the various modes of *qu* production, transmission, and reception as we see in the case of Wang, Kang, and Li.²⁶ I call these groups of literati that formed around these major *qu* writers “*qu* communities.”

Community is a complicated sociological concept that has given rise to a wide range of different interpretations and emphases in research. Running through most conceptions of community is, however, a common focus on three themes or elements: the social class of the members or participants, their spatial connection, and their shared interests or values.²⁷ In this study, I argue that participation in a genre defines a community.

One inspiration for my thinking about these *qu* writers and my approach to studying them is Pierre Bourdieu’s literary sociology, especially his concepts of the *literary field*, writers’ *positions* and *position-takings* in it, and *symbolic* and *cultural capital*.²⁸ A “literary field,” a term coined by Bourdieu, is a social universe with its own laws of functioning and specific relations of force in which literary works are produced.²⁹ I suggest that the *qu* genre, as a subfield in the “literary field” of sixteenth-century north China, also has its own laws of functioning and distinct

25. Writers and works marked with an asterisk in the Appendix are those from original sources and not included in *QMSQ*.

26. This, however, became increasingly common in the late Ming. For example, the *sanqu* writings of Chen Suowen 陳所聞 (1526?–after 1605) usually have long titles containing the dates and occasions on which the songs were written as well as the names of *qu* writers who participated.

27. See Campbell, “Social Structure, Space and Sentiment.”

28. I rely mainly on Bourdieu’s *Field of Cultural Production* and *Rules of Art*. The scholar who has actively introduced Bourdieu’s literary concepts to the study of modern Chinese literature is Michel Hockx; see Hockx, “Introduction”; and idem, “Theory as Practice.”

29. Bourdieu, “Field of Power, Literary Field and Habitus,” in idem, *Field of Cultural Production*, 163.

level of symbolic and cultural capital that writers gained by taking up the genre.

By using “*qu* community” as the basic unit in the study of *sanqu* and drama, we can also see how songs and dramas were produced, transmitted, and “used” among these writers, things less evident when we focus only on individual writers.³⁰ Studies on literary communities have encouraged us to “move away from the idea of the abstract individual as the producer of literary texts.”³¹ The social and communal nature of *qu* writing addressed in this book may be compared with recent studies on the social exchange of Chinese art and literature, such as Craig Clunas’s study of the social art of Wen Zhengming 文徵明 (1470–1559) or Colin Hawes’s study on the social circulation of poetry in the mid-Northern Song.³²

The amount of material and the wide-ranging activities of Wang, Kang, and Li easily warrant a separate study on each. I chose to undertake a collective study of all three, however, because of the style of their writings and the nature of their interactions. Separate studies could not fully reveal such crucial phenomena.

These three literati represent two overlapping generations of *qu* writers active in the first half of the sixteenth century. Wang and Kang were about a generation older than Li. We can divide the main course of their activities, which spanned almost seven decades, into three periods. The first period starts in 1501 when Kang and Wang met in the capital (Li was born a year later, in 1502) and ends before 1531, the year Li paid

30. This concept of a “*qu* community” is applicable to other periods in the history of Chinese drama and *sanqu* as well. For example, Wang Shih-pe has applied this concept in her study of Yuan playwrights and songwriters, “Cong Yuankanben chongtan Yuan zaju,” 244. Wang traces three *qu* communities among southern writers and states that a similar approach could be applied to the northern writers of the Yuan dynasty as well (*ibid.*, esp. 252–55).

31. Cox, *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School*, 5. Cox, in his study of romantic poets, offers the “group” as a key site for cultural production. Similar concerns and approaches can also be found in Summers and Peabworth, *Literary Circles and Cultural Communities in Renaissance England*. My discussion of the socialized mode of literary production in a community has also benefited from Arthur Marotti’s study of the transmission of English Renaissance lyrics in his *Manuscript, Print, and the English Renaissance Lyric*.

32. See Clunas, *Elegant Debts*; and Hawes, *The Social Circulation of Poetry in the Mid-Northern Song*.

a visit to Wang and Kang in Shaanxi. The second period, from 1531 to 1541 (the year Kang passed away), is the only period in which all three could have possibly been in contact. The final period features Wang and Li for the first decade, until 1551 when Wang passed away, and then only Li until his death in 1568. It is therefore clear that, instead of functioning as one cohesive group in *qu* writing, these three discharged officials were largely writing *qu* in two different, though not exclusive, regions and periods, and are best regarded as central figures in two successive *qu* communities in Shaanxi and Shandong, respectively.

This book is divided into two parts, with an interlude in between, based on these different periods in the lives of Kang, Wang, and Li and their subsequent impact on the larger world of song and drama around them.

Part I focuses on the formation of the Shaanxi community around Wang Jiushi and Kang Hai. Chapter 1 traces the paths of these two major writers into *qu* writing. Taking up the *qu* genre was an act of high visibility. Drawing on their own writings, the chapter explains why *qu*, as an alternative genre, suited these two rejected literati. Chapter 2 continues to explore what the *qu* genre offered them by illustrating how Wang and Kang used song and drama as a performance of their contentment and a way to reinvent an alternative and idealized path to retirement. The next two chapters move from the two major writers to the local Shaanxi community that formed around them. Chapter 3 shows how we may use the major writers as signposts to their communities and illustrates the function of *sanqu* as social and occasional writings in such a community. This chapter explores various modes of collective writing such as the practice of song matching and the sharing of a common subject matter in *sanqu* and drama and demonstrates how the practice formed a communal textual world. Chapter 4 focuses on the conflation of the textual and social worlds of the *qu* community, especially in the case of birthday songs, and argues that this communal world functioned as a world of their own for the discharged officials.

Chapter 5, an interlude, looks at the encounter between these major *qu* writers of two generations and two locales from 1531 to 1541. It begins with the 1531 visit by the young Li Kaixian to the two senior masters, Wang and Kang, in Shaanxi. Li's decision to write an extremely

long song suite dedicated to Kang Hai on their first meeting once again brings us back to the issue of the choice of genre. Then, we explore a major turning point in the literary scene of mid-Ming north China: In 1541, Kang passed away and Li Kaixian returned to Shandong in forced retirement. We look at how the loss of one leader (Kang Hai) in Shaanxi and the emergence of another (Li Kaixian) in Shandong transformed the dynamics of the two local *qu* communities.

This sets the stage for Part II, which focuses on the world of song and drama in Shandong with Li Kaixian at its center. In Chapter 6, we look at a local *qu* writing club in Li's home village and discuss how textual circulation enabled *qu* writings to travel beyond the local context and reach a much wider community of readers and commentators. This discussion utilizes a set of one hundred songs written by Li that initiated a large-scale and quasi-national level of song matching and colophon writing. Chapter 7 then discusses the drama activities and various *qu* printing projects of Li. In Chapter 8, I examine Li's role and influence in the Shandong *qu* community and argue that his path to becoming the leader of this community may be perceived as a self-fashioning process. I also look at Li's many defenses, apologies, and self-justifications for his involvement in song and drama, which remind us again of the alternative nature of his pursuits in the genre. In a brief concluding chapter, I discuss where the findings of this study lead us in terms of a reconsideration of the world of *qu* writing in the contexts of sixteenth-century north China and beyond.