Soundscapes in Selected Tang Poetries (*shi* 詩) and Song Lyrics (*ci* 詞)

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Abstract

Since the emergence of the term "soundscape" in the late 1960s and early 1970s, ethnomusicologists have drawn inspirations from cultural anthropology and approached music beyond its sound environment as a product of various human activities. Sinologists and scholars of classical Chinese music have suggested a way to read poetry and song lyrics as not just performances, as they were originally intended, but as textual performances and cultural phenomena. This study introduces the practices of textual production and the cultivation of artistic tastes through selected Tang (618–906) poetry and Song (960-1126) lyric (*ci* 詞). The author argues in her forthcoming monograph with Indiana University Press, *Dunhuang Expressive Arts and China's New Cosmopolitan Heritage* (2024) that these classic literary productions are indispensable for understanding the construction of China's Northland frontier culture and the Southland urban/metropolitan culture that continue to shape the country's music and performing arts culture.

Keywords: ethnomusicology, Song Dynasty lyric (*ci* 詞), soundscape, Tang Dynasty

Introduction

The foundational roots of soundscape studies can be traced back to architecture and urban design in the late 1960s, before Canadian composer and sound ecologist Raymond Murray Schafer began conducting comprehensive studies of sound environments in the early 1970s and throughout the 1980s. Schafer revolutionized the perception of sound environments by approaching an auditory landscape as both a subject of research, focusing on how people perceive it, and a form of artistic expression. Schafer defines a soundscape as an auditory environment that emphasizes individual or societal perception and understanding. Soundscape research from this period elevated the ordinary sounds of everyday life into a realm worthy of study and artistic exploration.

In 2001, ethnomusicologist Kay Kaufman Shelemay incorporated the term "soundscape" into the title of her book, drawing inspiration from cultural anthropologist Arjun Appadurai. Appadurai (1996) and Shelemay (2006) have identified multiple *scapes*, including ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, ideoscapes, finanscapes, and soundscapes. Appadurai's framework of "global cultural

flows" contributes five dimensions that construct what he terms "imagined worlds." These dimensions are not just diverse influences shaping contemporary reality but fundamental elements that constitute historically constructed ideas within different societies and cultures worldwide. They contribute to the construction of these "imagined worlds" and represent the perspectives and ideas of various groups and individuals across the globe (1996, p. 33). Shelemay, on the other hand, aligned more with the three-part analytical model proposed by ethnomusicologist Alan Merriam in 1964 and approached music beyond its sound environment as a product of various human activities.

In the cross-disciplinary field of ethnomusicology and sinology, scholars of classical Chinese music have suggested a way to read poetries and song lyrics as not just performances, as they were originally intended, but as textual performances and cultural phenomena. For instance, Bell Yung (1987) highlighted the emphasis which Chinese literati musician/scholar musicians place on the literary content of a *qin* musical composition. Joseph Lam (2017) used the sounds, sights, and smells in historical texts to introduce the categories of sound culture, musical world, and soundscape and to guide us think about the experience of sound in the Southern Song. In (*Un*)*consciousness? Music in the Daoist context of nonbeing* (2019), I also pointed out that Chinese scholar musicians use linguistic terms that suggest spatial concepts in the visual dimension to describe aural/sonic events. Detailed conceptualized qualities of sound have existed in the history of qin music since the sixth dynasty, when Qu Zhan 麴瞻 specified the perceived quality of different tones in *Qin sheng lü tu* 琴声律图.

Building on existing scholarship on soundscape and my own research publications, this study introduces the practices of textual production and the cultivation of literary and musical tastes through selected Tang (618–906 CE) poetry and Song (960-1126) lyric (*ci* 詞). Specifically, I argue in my forthcoming monograph with Indiana University Press, *Dunhuang Expressive Arts and China's New Cosmopolitan Heritage* (2024) that classical literary productions such as Tang dynasty frontier poetries and Song dynasty song lyrics are indispensable for understanding the construction of China's Northland frontier culture and the Southland metropolitan culture that continue to shape the country's performing arts culture. In the following sections, I examine intertextually through an ethnopoetic lens the performative processes of selected literary samples and propose to read them as not just performances, as they were originally intended, but also as textual performances and cultural phenomena. (Yung, 1987; Owen, 2019; Lam, 2017) The case studies present in this study offer an outlook to the historically and discursively formed frontier and metropolitan cultures of China's Tang dynasty and Song dynasty—literary topography created and constituted of time, space, cultural agents, and signs and metaphors.

China's Tang Dynasty

The Tang dynasty was arguably the pinnacle of imperial Chinese culture. It was one of the most cosmopolitan ages in Chinese history. Elements of various foreign cultures had been transmitted into the Central Plains along the north-western borderlands for thousands of years, but the Tang dynasty was particularly powerful and prosperous, and the infusions of various cultures and arts at that time were distilled into a rich and diverse cultural content.

Under the leadership of Emperor Taizong Li Shimin (r. 627–50), China subdued its nomadic neighbours from the north and northwest, securing peace and safety on overland trade routes reaching as far as Syria and Rome. The reunification of China initiates a period of prosperity, trade relations, and far-reaching influence. Marked by strong and benevolent rule, successful diplomatic relationships, economic expansion, and a cultural efflorescence of cosmopolitan style, the Tang empire expanded far beyond the Central Plain.

Chang'an, today's Xi'an in China's northwest Shanxi Province was a large-scale metropolis during the Tang Dynasty. It became the capital city and attracted merchants, clerics, and envoys from India, Persia, Arabia, Syria, Korea, and Japan. Foreign tongues were a common part of daily life. Foreign influences on social customs, fashion, and costume were prominent. Musicians, dancers, and other entertainers from the Western Regions (present-day Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region) were invited to perform for the enjoyment of the princes and courtiers. Chang'an was at the time one of the largest and richest cities in the world.

Scholar officials, also known as the *literatis*, formed the new elites by taking the civil service exanimation. This new social elite gradually replaced the old aristocracy, and the recruitment of gentlemen from the south contributed to the cultural amalgamation that had already begun in the 6th century. Most importantly, the Tang scholar-officials produced some of the finest literature in Chinese history. Written Chinese, partly because of its geographical spread, served as a prestigious, cosmopolitan script across medieval Asia, and music and other expressive arts from Central Asia entered China, heavily favoured at the Tang court and popular in broader urban settings.

Tang Dynasty Poetry

The Tang dynasty was an era of rapid transformation in Chinese poetry. This period not only established the model of regulated verse, but also saw innovations in poetry that would greatly influence later times. The Tang dynasty was a golden age of music and dance, which were present at court and in the homes of officials, in drinking establishments, and in temples and religious festivals. Several Tang emperors' enjoyment of music led them to promote and engage in music—which in turn elevated the musicality of Tang poetic content.

The *New Book of Tang* notably describes Emperor Xuanzong as a music enthusiast who took part in performing:

> 玄宗既知律，又酷爱法曲，选坐部伎子弟三百教於梨园，声有误者，帝必觉而正之。
>
> Xuanzong knew music well and especially enjoyed *faqu*. He even selected three hundred musicians from the "string division" to be trained in Liyuan. Whenever a musician made a mistake in a performance, the emperor would always correct the error. (Translated by Kuang)

Music and dance thus occupied an indispensable position in the life of Tang court royalty (Kishibe, 1940; Schafer, 1985). Cui Lingqi's (fl. 713–765) *Record of the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts* (*Jiaofangji* 教坊記) is one of many historical records of Tang musical cosmopolitanism in an urban setting. It is a collection of documentation on musicians and their careers and contains some of the music and tunes found in the Dunhuang region. The well-known line "Emperor Xuanzong loved music and loved new music" (玄宗爱樂爱新樂) validify the historical knowledge that forms of music and dance, as well as the social audience in the changes of the Tang dynasty, were thus intricately turned into art forms that carried the country's history.

Tang Frontier Poetry (Biansai Shi 邊塞詩)

Frontier poetry (*biansai shi* 邊塞詩) came into being as a genre in Chinese literary history in the Southern Dynasties. It contributed to the poetic imagination and cultural constructs associated with fixed characteristics or gender stereotypes: tough, austere, masculine (the North), versus soft, sensuous, and feminine (the South). Frontier poetry reached its heyday in the Sui and Tang dynasties, owing to constant warfare at the north-western borders. The characteristics and stereotypes of the genre became firmly established, and they continue to influence the literary construction of Chinese frontier imagery.

The north-western frontier was a popular theme in poetry of the High Tang period (c. 713–766). "Life on the frontier," which includes vivid narratives describing departure for the frontier, the difficulties of life in the deserts, and scenes of battle became a particularly important theme during the Tang. Dynasties in north-western China since the Han established a military defensive zone, the so-called border fortified zones (*sai* 塞 and *bianting* 邊庭), between the hinterlands of the Central Plains and the northern nomadic nations. Poems with titles such as "At the Frontier" ("*Saishang qu*" 塞上曲) would use the immense territories of lands bordering the Great Wall as their setting. Present-day Gansu, Ningxia, and Qingdao regions in the northwest, Xiao Pass in the northern Central Plains, and Dazhen Pass in the west are the inner borderlands of this zone. The external north–south and south–northwest boundaries were composed of concentric circles of defensive zones, forming a tiered regional structure, with Hexi and Longyou in a surrounding defensive formation for the Central Plains region.

Under the administration of Emperor Wu of the Han (Han Wudi, r. 140–87 BCE), at the end of the Western Han, Dunhuang Prefecture had a mostly Han population of more than 38,000. Immigrants and resident troops from the Central Plains brought Han culture, which flourished and established a solid foundation in Dunhuang, becoming dominant from then on. By the time of the Wei, Jin, and Northern and Southern dynasties, the Dunhuang region for a time saw intermarriages between Xiongnu and Han and a rise in the popularity of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism.

The arts became integrated according to imperial state policies aimed at governing the ethnic populations of the Han, Sui, and Tang dynasties. Emperor Wu was the first ruler to bring the Music Bureau (*yuefu* 樂府) to full development. The Music Bureau collected poems and folksongs and provided music for court ceremonies and state sacrifices. During the Sui and Tang dynasties, urban civilizations centring on the metropoles of Chang'an 長安 and Luoyang 洛陽 produced profound effects throughout the empire.

In 711, the Tang court established the Tang dynasty's first military commissioner of Hexi. The Western Regions became a border city hub, which melded different cultural systems, including Han of the Central Plains, Greek, Indian, Central Asian, and West Asian, before transmitting them to other border cities.

Interactions between the Central Plains and the Western Regions during the Tang dynasty have received the most attention from scholars, largely because of Chinese–Western exchanges taking place there. Tang dynasty frontier poems made up a significant part—one to two thousand tests—of *Complete Tang Poems* (*Quan tangshi* 全唐詩), an early eighteenth-century compilation.

Frontier poems existed in a narrow sense and in a broad sense. Narrowly defined, they refer primarily to areas along the Great Wall and in fortified borderlands in the Hexi 河西 and Longyou 隴右 region in modern Qinghai and Gansu Province; their authors had personally experienced frontier living. Broadly defined, Tang frontier poetry arose at the end of the Sui dynasty and the beginning of the Tang dynasty, peaked during the Kaiyuan and Tianbao eras, and continued to be disseminated during the middle and late Tang. Therefore, the frontier should have the prescriptiveness of history, but this was established only through practice, without precluding similar poetry from other dynasties. The topical content of frontier poetry as a genre was prescribed—it must relate to frontier living—but many poems expressed emotions, described objects and natural scenery, embodied correspondence between friends, and depicted spousal love without directly invoking war or the preparations for war, which influenced the shape of the Chinese empire and the lives of its people during the Tang dynasty. Because of this, the multi-ethnic performing arts depicted in frontier poems were more variable, featuring a kind of openness and sense of possibility. Even more broadly speaking, frontier poetry emphasised expressions of various subjects relating to the frontier, with the premise and background of frontier defence (Kuang, 2024).

North-western China, where Dunhuang is located, was a basis for Tang dynasty frontier poems. Tang poets Wang Wei, Zhang Yue, Li Bai, Du Fu, Bai Juyi, Yuan Zhen, and Liu Yuxi all wrote poems depicting the Western Regions, plus the music and dance of Chang'an. These literary works allow us not only to comprehend

the beauty of dance from hundreds or a thousand years ago, but also to choreograph dramas of Dunhuang performing arts: they contain descriptions of ancient music and dance, particularly the content and form of music and dance during the Han and Tang dynasties. These ancient poems, especially those depicting multinational music and dance performances of the Western Regions, provide the best materials for our present-day deconstruction, imagining, and reconstruction of cosmopolitan musical arts. As the overall research standards for dance arts have increased, the most profound effects of poetry on dance and the intrinsic relationship between dance and poetry have received greater levels of attention.

Music and Performing Arts in Tang Frontier Poetries

Wang Wei, composed a quatrain for his friend Mr. Yuan, second in his generation of his branch of the Yuan family, seeing him off on a journey to the remote northwestern frontier territory of Anxi, the "Western Region."

> By the walls of Wei City the rain at dawn dampens the light dust,
> All green around the guest lodge, the colours of willows revive.
> I urge you now to finish just one more cup of wine:
> Once you go west through Yang Pass there will be no more old friends.

As noted by Owen (2019), this poem, *Sending off Mr. Yuan to Anxi*, would become one of the most famous poems in Chinese literary history. Yang Pass, which is one of the most well-known historical landmarks along China's historic Silk Road, would also make its way into the musical composition.

We know that Wang Wei's poem had become a repeated song by the end of the eighth century and sang generally at parting banquets. Instead of pointing to the specific geographic location which it was named, "Yang Pass" became a metaphor in the song suggesting any remote destination for which the person was leaving. Interestingly, *Sending off Mr. Yuan to Anxi*, the poem's original title was lost as the song lyrics became generic. The new title, *The Song of Yang Pass* (*Yangguan qu*) delivers a musical or rather, performative suggestiveness, which is at the core of Chinese aesthetics.

What about music without words? "Yang Pass" also became one of the most popular Chinese 7-string *qin* compositions dated to the Tang dynasty. *Yangguan Sandie* ['The three strains of Yangguan' or 'Yang Pass with Three Repeats'] adopted the suggestive title as well as the sad sentiment of the original poem. The entire song is repeated three times with expansion in the last to emphasise the sorrow of separation, with a pattern of A (abc), Al (albc), A2 (albcd), coda. For the bridge linking each section, some *qin* players would slow down and add gliding tones to bring out the deep feeling of sorrow. The sombre tune and the obscure tone emitted the sadness of the farewell scene in the original poem.

In "Some features Chinese qin music," Yoko Mitani compared six versions of the first section of the *qin* piece, 'Yangguan sandie". It was believed that all six probably stem from the tradition of *Qinxue rumen* (1864). According to Bell Yung, different versions of the *qin* notation of this piece survives in thirty-three noted

exemplars s spanning several centuries, the earliest one from 1491, the latest from 1922. While Mitani believed the six versions are essentially coincident in melodic contour though different in metrical structure and rhythmic detail, Yung highlighted instead the "the ideology and performance practice of the *guqin* tradition.":

> Perhaps the most important factor here is the close and exclusive association between the instrument (and its music) and the literati of China, an association that dates back to the time of Confucius, who is said to have studied the instrument and enjoyed it. Among the many ramifications of this association is the emphasis which the musician/scholar places on the literary content of a composition. As Robert van Gulik writes, "special care is given [in the handbooks] to describing the mood the composer was in when he created his music, and what thought he wished to express in his composition. It is the highest aim of the player in his execution of the tune to reproduce faithfully the mood of the composer." (Gulik 1969, p. 88; quoted in Yung 1987, p. 84)

This is preciously the reason that the soundscape of Chinese music must be addressed beyond the sonic dimension and music technicality. In the case of the *qin* music, as Yung pointed out, the "mood" of a composition is prescribed:

> […] by its programmatic title and, in most zither handbooks, also by a literary preface to the notation. The primary aim of a performance is to evoke that prescribed mood; the musical sound itself is but a vehicle by which to arrive at that aim. The musician/scholar acknowledges that there is more than one way of performing a composition, so long as the prescribed mood is evoked. The emphasis on the literary content of the music rather than the musical sound itself is closely related to the nature and the function of the notation used by *guqin* performers. It is well-known that the notation, peculiar to this instrument, is a tablature which defines the string to be plucked, the position along the string to be stopped, and the manner in which the strings are to be stopped and plucked.1 It provides, however, only rather vague suggestion on the metrical, rhythmic, and phrasal aspects of the music. (Yung, 1987, p. 84)

Narratives of Tang Dynasty *Hu* Dances (胡舞)

Hu xuan dance was extremely well-received at court during the Tang dynasty. The *hu xuan*, because Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang greatly favoured it, became especially popular at court. People of Chang'an learned it, and it remained popular for half a century.

Tang poet Bai Juyi points out in *Hu Xuan Lady* that the female artists performing *hu xuan* were from Kangju 康居, also known as Kangguo 康國, present-day Samarkand. The Qing dynasty scholar Wei Yuanda 魏遠達 (1794–1857) investigated the evidence in *A Military History of the Qing Dynasty*《聖武記》: "The Middle zhuz of the Kazakh *jüz* or hordes is nomadic in pursuit of water and grass and lived in Kangju since the ancient times" (1984). Thus, the *hu xuan* dance in Tang poetry perhaps referred to the dances of the ancient Kazakhs. Because this kind of dance, introduced by the so-called Hu people, had strong and forceful tempos, with galloping and joyous movements involving spins and steps, it was known as *hu xuan*. The Tang dynasty *Comprehensive Statutes* (*Tongdian* 《通典》) by Du You 杜佑 (735–812)

states: "The dance involves spinning quickly like the wind; thus, it was commonly known as *hu xuan*."

Bai Juyi, in his famous poem *The Nomad Whirling Dancer: Against Adopting Foreign Customs at the End of the Tianbao Reign, the Northwestern Kingdom of Kangju Sent the Dancer as a Tribute* (《胡旋女-戒近习也 (天宝末，康居国献之)》), wrote of the *hu xuan* dancer:

> 胡旋女，胡旋女。心應弦，手應鼓。弦鼓一聲雙袖舉，回雪飄颻轉蓬舞。
> 左旋右轉不知疲，千匝萬周無已時。人間物類無可比，奔車輪緩旋風遲。
> 曲終再拜謝天子，天子為之微啟齒。胡旋女，出康居，徒勞東來萬裡餘。
> 中原自有胡旋者，鬥妙爭能爾不如。天寶季年時欲變，臣妾人人學圜轉。
> 中有太真外祿山，二人最道能胡旋。梨花園中冊作妃，金雞障下養為兒。
> 祿山胡旋迷君眼，兵過**黃**河疑未反。貴妃胡旋惑君心，死棄馬嵬念更深。
> 從茲地軸天維轉，五十年來製不禁。胡旋女，莫空舞，數唱此歌悟明主。

From Bai Juyi's poetry, we learn that the dancers performed *hu xuan* 胡旋, the nomadic style of whirling dance from Kangju 康居, based on a short note on the dancer's origin, which states that at the end of the Tianbao reign, the northwestern kingdom of Kangju sent the dancer as a tribute.

The poems of Wang Wei, Bai Juyi, and other Tang scholar-officials, such as Yuan Zhen (779–831) demonstrate ways of using poetry to express emotions and of using music and dance scenery to construct historical landscapes.

The Song Dynasty Song lyric (*ci* 詞)

China in the 1000s was recognized by Marco Polo (1254-1324) as one the most advanced societies in the world as he travelled from Venice through Asia.

Having re-established a central government after the Tang's collapse and the unrest of the Five Dynasties (907–960), the Northern Song court places high emphasis on civil administration over military efficiency, leading to one of the most humane, cultured, and intellectual societies in Chinese history. Highly cultivated in the arts and humanities, Chinese society under the Song dynasty (960–1126) was an era with impressive commercial and technological vibrancy "governed by poets," as Julie Landau put it.

In 1126, the court moved to the region south of the Yangtze River and Hangzhou was established as the capital of the Southern Song dynasty (1126–1279). The Southland, or the region south of the Yangtze River refers generally and geographically as *Jiangnan* 江南 was at the very centre of all the cultural creativities. Disproportionately important in Chinese cultural history, this region, *Jiangnan, is highly* romanticized in Chinese literary and historical texts as a place of desire, which has attracted nomads from beyond the northwestern borderland for centuries. As a conventional figure for pleasant scenery and drunken festivities in China's Tang dynasty poetry and Song dynasty lyric (*ci* 詞), Jiangnan is the "routinized, commonplace figure of desire, long-since stripped of its original rhetorical significance" (Owen 2015). The concept of "the Southland is best" became a

simplified rhetorical statement.

In comparison to the Tang frontier poetries that highlights the Northland and conjures the idea of majestic wildness and tough muscularity through images of boundless deserts, the Song dynasty lyrics invokes the Chinese aesthetic notions of subtle elegance, attention to details, and feminine beauty, reminiscent of *Jiangnan*, the place name for the Southland through imagery of bridged canal towns and soft spring willows as a spatial metaphor.

The emergence and early development of Song dynasty lyrics can be traced back to the Tang Dynasty's songbooks and lyricists, particularly from the early eleventh century until its end. *ci* lyric gradually thrived from the mid-Tang Dynasty. Initially, the prevalent form was the "short lyrics" (*xiaoling* 小令), commonly used at gatherings of officials. However, Song dynasty lyricists like Liu Yong, known for his frequent presence in the Entertainment Quarter, crafted song lyrics encompassing themes of love, travel, and adeptly handled the more complex "long lyrics" (*manci* 慢詞).

Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101), alongside a younger generation of lyricists born between 1045 and 1056, played significant roles in the genre's evolution during the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries. This period marked the maturation of the genre and its recognition as literature to be both sung and read. Su Shi revolutionised lyric writing by introducing unconventional topics beyond the genre's traditional scope. He experimented with diverse styles and made lyrics more biographical by adding subtitles, prefaces, and specific internal references. His lyrics often delved into personal themes, such as dreaming of his deceased wife, topics not typically performed at social gatherings. Unlike the act of singing, Su Shi referred to the performance of lyric texts as "reciting" (*yin* 吟), employing a verb associated with classical poetry.

Shuidiao getou 水調歌頭 ("Song for the River Tune")

The moon—how old is it?
I hold the cup and ask the clear blue sky
But I don't know, in palaces up there
When is tonight?
If only I. could ride the wind and see—
But no, jade towers
So high up, might be too cold
For dancing with my shadow—
How could *there*, be like *here*?

Turning in the red chamber
Beneath the carved window
The brightness baffles sleep
But why complain?
The moon is always full at parting
A man knows grief and joy, separation, and reunion
The moon, clouds, and fair skies, waxing and waning—
An old story, this struggle for perfection!

Here is to long life
This loveliness we share even a thousand miles apart!

Song lyric, as a poetic form, involved writing or "filling in" (*tianci*) words or lyrics to pre-existing popular tunes, some of which originated as early as the 8th century. In the Northern Song period, this genre was predominantly focused on providing entertainment and leisure. Musical entertainers performed these lyrics in various settings, ranging from official banquets to the song houses found in urban entertainment districts. The genre served as a common form of entertainment across different social gatherings during that time.

The tune *Shuidiao getou* 水調歌頭 (Song for the River Tune) is probably one of Su Shi's most well-known lyrics. Su Zhe's visit to his brother in Xuzhou after seven years of separation coincided with the Mid-Autumn Moon Festival in 1077. The night before his departure, he composed a farewell poem using the tune "River Music" (水調歌頭), echoing a similar song his brother Su Shi had written for him the previous year on the same festival. Su Zhe's poem focused on the sadness of leaving and depicted the lonely boat he would board the following night, emphasising the distant separation the brothers would experience.

Upon reading Su Zhe's poignant farewell, Su Shi responded with his own song lyric. His poem took a different tone, centring on the theme of retiring from government service to return to their hometown. It concluded with vivid images of the brothers reunited and joyously spending time together back in Meishan.

Song dynasty lyrics emphasised the emotional resonance of images, akin to the sense of emptiness observed in Song landscape painting. This emptiness was perceived as a desired conscious state, fostering the ability to freely engage in artistic creations. In an era where personal sentiments were often kept private, scholar-officials like Su Shi freely shared his feelings in his compositions in the song lyric. The parallels between Song lyrics and landscape painting highlight the value placed on emotional associations and the freedom of artistic expression during that era.

Conclusion

Ethnomusicologists, espousing a discipline whose conceptual focus tends to emphasise both society and the individual, and both synchronicity and diachronicity, have attempted to outline models that take account of the historical and individual dimensions of music. As early as 1940, Charles Seeger was addressing the idea of music as historical evidence as early as 1940. By the late 1960s, Adrienne L. Kaeppler was tracing the history of Tongan dance genres, and by 1971, Jacob Wainwright Love was researching the history of children's songs in Samoa. In 1980, Kay Shelemay was pointing out that "an ethnomusicological study of a living music culture provides a multi-faceted and unique database, which in its totality may well illuminate important aspects of a culture's history" (1980, p. 235). The study of any artistic tradition inevitably implicates historical processes. These are not always the focus of research, but they often come into play in studies of specific genres.

As I argued in my forthcoming monograph with Indiana University Press,

Dunhuang Expressive Arts and China's New Cosmopolitan Heritage (2024), Tang poetry and Song lyric are indispensable for understanding the construction of China's Northland frontier culture and the Southland metropolitan culture that continue to shape the country's music and performing arts culture. Even today, the Tang poetry and Song lyric (ci 詞) is remembered and recreated for capturing the human sentiments, reflecting on home and distant loved ones. The Tang and Song scholars' poetic prowess continues to resonate, showcasing their ability to craft verse that was deeply affecting and emotionally resonant, creating a historic soundscape that became the foundation of China's expressive arts.

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Biography

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