



AMES 284K

**Kunqu, the Classical Opera of  
Globalized China**

Spring 2016

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Dates / contact hours: 300 minutes per week for seven weeks; plus up to 3 field trips to attend live performances of kunqu opera in Suzhou or Shanghai

Academic Credit: 1 course

Areas of Knowledge: recommended CZ, ALP

Modes of Inquiry: recommended CCI

Course format: lecture, discussion, kunqu film screenings

**Instructor's Information**

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Joseph Lam, Professor of Musicology, University of Michigan ([jsclam@umich.edu](mailto:jsclam@umich.edu)).

Joseph Lam is a musicologist-sinologist, specializing in Chinese music culture and history (11<sup>th</sup> century to present). Currently he is working on the final draft of *Kunqu, the Classical Opera of Globalized China*, an interdisciplinary analysis of kunqu as an artistic-cultural-social discourse of Chinese realities, selves, and value in historical and contemporary contexts. The proposed course is based on research and writings of the book project.

**Prerequisite(s), if applicable**

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No prerequisites, though some background knowledge of music, theatre, Chinese history and language would be helpful.

**Course Description**

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This course examines kunqu, a historical genre of Chinese opera which first blossomed in mid 16<sup>th</sup> century Ming China and was popularly practiced until the late 1800s of Qing China (CZ). The genre barely survived in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 2001, UNESCO declared kunqu a Masterpiece of Oral and Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, and since then the genre has been vigorously revived and developed. It is now one of the most popularly performed and critically discussed genres of Chinese performing arts (CCI). Blessed with a large repertory of dramatic works, a wealth of historical sources and theoretical treatises, a continuously transmitted tradition of codified performance practices, and a critical community of creative and virtuoso master performers, kunqu projects a microcosm of contemporary Chinese expressive culture and strategies built with historical memories, creative and passionate imaginations, and mesmerizing sounds and sights. To understand how and why a contemporary kunqu show, such as *Peony Pavilion, the Young Lovers' Edition* (2004) is produced and consumed the way it is, is to witness a dynamic and pragmatic discourse of Chinese desires, histories, identities, realities, and values in 21<sup>st</sup> century and globalized contexts. To hear and see what and how kunqu “brings Chinese characters and emotions alive on stage” (*yanhuole* 演活了) is to intellectually and sensually engage with expressive China as it theatrically unfolds. By examining kunqu as the classical opera of globalized China through its representative works of literary lyrics, flowing melodies, and elegant acts and dances, and by analyzing the phenomenon with current theories of selves, cultural-social pragmatics, and opera as cultural-social-political performance, this course creates a passage for students to personally enter the expressive world of Chinese people, and experience their theatrical performances up close (ALP).

## Course Goals / Objectives

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Students will learn to engage kunqu as connoisseurs, who are not only familiar with story lines of representative kunqu libretti and their codified performance practices of acting, singing, dancing, facial-making, costume-wearing and stage designing, but are capable of critiquing performances and expressions with culturally sanctioned vocabularies and strategies (ALP learning).

Students will learn to approach Chinese expressive culture intellectually and practically, identifying its theories and practices, noting its selective and pragmatic connections between the past and the present, and analyzing meanings being explicitly and implicitly communicated by discursive partners (CCI learning).

Students will learn a body of detailed information with which they can comparatively understand China in global contexts (diversity and CZ learning).

Students will learn methods and techniques to understand music and performing arts as complex and dynamics communications that should be read, seen, heard, and felt interpretively and strategically (ALP learning).

## Required Text(s)/Resources

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The assigned articles will be made available and accessible by DKU students online through the Duke library system, Sakai, and other websites, or will be made available on line in PDF form.

The assigned audio-visual recordings of kunqu masterpieces will be made available and accessible on line.

## Recommended Text(s)/Resources

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## Additional Materials (optional)

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Students must have computers or tablets that allow them to access Youku, YouTube, and other websites of audio-visual recordings of kunqu performances.

## Course Requirements / Key Evidences

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Students will write weekly essays on kunqu scenes that they are asked to view in detail. They will be given analytical frameworks or paradigms for their viewing, which include but are not limited to: dramatic themes and portrayal of characters, literary structures in aria lyrics, melodic and rhythmic expressions, relationships among sounds, sights, and bodily movement.

Students will familiarize themselves with a selected repertory of kunqu scenes. They will be asked to identify excerpts from this repertory in mid-term and final exams.

Students will conduct research on a kunqu scene of their choice, investigating its creative process, dramatic expressions, performance practices and other topic with reference to a theoretical concern, such as opera as a social discourse, drama as political commentary.

## Technology Considerations, if applicable

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We will require standard AV equipment and the ability to show PowerPoint presentations during classroom sessions. Screenings of full operas will be open to the DKU community when possible.

## Assessment Information / Grading Procedures

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(15%) Attendance and class discussion.

(35%) Weekly essays (up to 500 words) on one of two assigned kunqu scenes (each is 30 minutes or less in length) viewed and analyzed with reference to facts and theories discussed in lectures.

Maximum 5 points for each essay (2 for facts presented; 2 for arguments logically presented; and 1 for effective prose).

(10 %) Midterm examination. Identification of 10 audio-visual excerpts from kunqu masterpieces.

(20 %) Final examination. Identification of 10 audio-visual excerpts from kunqu masterpieces

(20%) Term paper (up to 2000 words, not including bibliography) on a topic approved by instructor.

Assignments and exams will be aligned with course objectives. Detailed rubrics for each assignment will be given to students (and explained fully) so that students are aware of the expectations for their work and how grades will be assigned. Extensive feedback will be given on the first and second weekly essays. To help the EFL students, the instructor will consult with the EFL instructors to coordinate specific exercises (strategies for reading, identifying key points, writing summaries, etc.) when possible.

### **Diversity and Intercultural Learning (see Principles of DKU Liberal Arts Education)**

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This course will make students confront their own cultural and ethnic identities and communicative practices, realizing diversity in humanity. For example, male students from the US will see how their “manly practices” cannot be put on kunqu stages.

This course will make students compare traditional Chinese culture and their own, grasping what and how concepts and practices might or might not cross cultural and ethnic boundaries. For example, students will see how traditional Chinese concepts of friendship and loyalty are similar and different to their contemporary and non-Chinese ones.

### **Course Policies and Guidelines**

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- **COURSE POLICIES AND GUIDELINES:**

Instructors’ expectations for all assignments and activities will be made as explicitly as possible, given the likelihood of a wide range of background conventions and habits among the students. The Duke Kunshan University Community Standard will be discussed and adhered to.

- **ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:**

Each student is bound by the academic honesty standard of Duke Kunshan University. Its Community Standard states: “Duke Kunshan University is a community composed of individuals of diverse cultures and backgrounds. We are dedicated to scholarship, leadership, and service and to the principles of honesty, fairness, respect, and accountability. Members of this community commit to reflect upon and uphold these principles in all academic and non-academic endeavors, and to protect and promote a culture of integrity.” Violations of the DKU academic honesty standard will not be tolerated. Cheating, lying, falsification, or plagiarism in any practice will be considered as an inexcusable behavior and will result in zero points for the activity.

- **CLASS ATTENDANCE:**

Students are responsible for all the information presented in class. Class attendance and participation are important components of the learning experience. All students are expected to participate during class time.

- **POLICY ON MAKE-UP WORK/EXAMS:**

Students are allowed to make up work only if missed as a result of illness or other unanticipated circumstances warranting a medical excuse, consistent with DKU policy. You must notify the instructor in advance if you will miss an exam or project deadline. Project extensions requested for medical reasons must be negotiated at the time of illness.

**The use of mobile phones, tablets, and laptops is not permitted during the class, except when approved by the instructor.**

## Tentative Course Outline or Schedule

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### Week1/Lecture 1. Introduction

Topics: Kunqu as a multi-media performing art.

Issues: What is kunqu? Chinese kunqu in globalized China and beyond.

Viewing: “Sifan” (“Yearning for worldly pleasures”; 28 minutes) and “Jingmeng” (the Interrupted Dream; 30 minutes) from *Mudanting (Peony Pavilion)*

Reading:

A.C. Scott. “Longing for World Pleasures,” in *Traditional Chinese Plays* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1967), vol. 2, 14-39.

Isabel Wong, “Kunqu,” in *East Asia: China, Japan, and Korea* edited by Robert C Province, Yosihiko tokumaru, and J. Lawrence Witzleben, the *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music*, Vol. 4 (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 289-296.

Bell Yung, “Chinese Opera: An Overview,” in *East Asia: China, Japan, and Korea* edited by Robert C Province, Yosihiko tokumaru, and J. Lawrence Witzleben, the *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music*, Vol. 4 (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 275-280.

Andrea Goldman, “The Nun Who Wouldn’t Be: Representations of Female Desire in Two Performance Genres of ‘Si Fan,’” *Late Imperial China*, 22/1/(June 2001), 71-138.

### Week 1/Lecture 2. Kunqu features and styles

Topics: Musical structure and performance practices—speaking; chanting; singing; acting; dancing; musical instruments

Viewing: “Yeben” (Flee by night; 25 minutes); “Xiaoyan Jingbian” (Garden banquet and news of the rebellion) from *Changshendian (Palace of Lasting Life; 40 minutes)*

Reading:

Cyril Birch, “Introduction: To the Reader as Fellow Mandarin,” in *Scenes from Mandarins: The Elite Theater of the Ming* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 1-20.

Harold Acton, “Flee by Nite” in *Famous Chinese Plays* (Beiping: Henri Vetch, 1937), 10-18.

Tang Xianzu, "The Thrilling Alarm," in *Gems of Kunqu Opera* (Suzhou: Suzhou daxue chubanshe, 2006), 373-389.

Week 2/Lecture 3. Kunqu history 1

Topic: Rise of Kunqu

Viewing :CCTV *600 Hundred Years of Kunqu Opera*; episodes 1-3

<http://english.cntv.cn/english/special/kunqu/01/index.shtml>

Reading:

William Dolby, *A History of Chinese Drama*, 71-156, with focus on 90-113.

Zhang Tai, "A Night Performance at Golden Hill," in *Vignettes from the Late Ming*, translation and annotation by Yang Ye (Seattle and London, 1999), 87-88.

Week 2/Lecture 4. Kunqu history 2

Topic: Kunqu and traditional Suzhou culture and gardens

Viewing: *CCTV: 600 Hundred Years of Kunqu Opera*; episodes 4-6 (45 minutes X 3)

Reading:

Frances Wood trans., "Traditional Gardens of Suzhou" by Liu Dunzhen, the Garden History Society, Vol. 10/2 (10982), 108-141.

Craig Cluna, *Art in China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); chapters to be assigned; about 50 printed pages.

Week 3/Lecture 5. Kunqu history 3

Topic: Kunqu decline and revival.

Viewing: *CCTV: 600 Hundred Years of Kunqu Opera*; episodes 7-10.

Reading

Annping Chin, *Four Sisters of Hofei: A History* (New York: Scribner, 2002) 147-182

Joseph S.C.Lam, "Researching and Teaching East Asian Musics as ICH and as Expressions of Humanists Selves," in *Sharing Cultures 2013: Proceedings of the International Conference on Intangible Heritage*, edited by Sergio Lira, Rogerio Amodoa and Cristina Pinheiro (Aveiro, Portugal: Green Lines Institutes, 2013), 275-290.

Week 3/Lecture 6. Kunqu history 4

Topic: Individual masters, their creativity and roles in developing and preserving kunqu-- Ye Tang; Mei Lanfang; Yu Zhenfei; Chuan Generation masters

Reading:

Joseph Lam, "Notational Representation and Contextual Constraints: How and Why Did Ye Tang Notate His Kun Opera Arias?" in *Themes and Variations: Writings on Music in Honor of Rulan Chao Pian* (1996), 26-35.

Joseph Lam, "Impulsive Scholars and Sentimental Heroes," in *Gender in Chinese Music*, edited by Rachel Harris, Rowan Pease, and Shyr Ee Tan (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2013), 87-106.

Week 4/Lecture 7. Kunqu theory 1

Topic: Traditional principles of singing and composing kunqu, and “bringing characters alive on stage.”

Viewing: “Qinqiao” (Zither Seductions; 30 minutes) from *Yuzanji* (Jade Hairpin)

“Tanci” (Ballad) from *Changshengdian* (Palace of Lasting Life; 35 minutes)

Reading:

Koo Siu-Sun and Diana Yue, *Wei Liang-fu: Rules of Singing Qu*, in *Writings on the Theory of Kun Qu Singing* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press), 35-73.

Yu Shulu/Strassberg, “The Singing Techniques of Kunqu,” *Chinoperl, Papers 6* (1976), 45-81.

Joseph Lam, “A Kunqu Masterpiece and Its Interpretations: *Tanci* (The Ballad) from Hong Sheng’s *Changshengdian* (Palace of Lasting Life), 33.2, *Chinoperl* (2014), 97-120.

Week 4/Lecture 8. Kunqu theory 2

Topic: Traditional and contemporary kunqu instrumental music

Reading:

Tsu Yingfai, “Ensembles: The Modern Chinese Orchestra,” in *East Asia: China, Japan, and Korea* edited by Robert C Province, Yosihiko Tokumaru, and J. Lawrence Witzleben, the *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music*, Vol. 4 (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 227-233.

Alan Thrasher, *Chinese Musical Instruments* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1-124; browse through.

Week 5/Mid-term exam or student presentations

Week 5/Lecture 9. Kunqu and late Imperial China

Topic: Kunqu and elite culture and identity in Ming China

Viewing: Selected scenes from the *Peony Pavilion* (60 minutes) and the *Palace of Lasting Life* (60 minutes)

Reading:

Chang Tai, “An Epitaph for Myself,” in *Vignettes from the Late Ming*, translation and annotation by Yang Ye (Seattle and London, 1999), 98-101.

Denis Mair, “Yuan Mei, Champion of Individual Taste,” in *Hawai’I Reader in Traditional Chinese Culture*, edited by Mcitor H. Mair, Nancy S. Steinhardt and Paul R. Goldin (Honolulu: University of Hawai’I Press, 2005), 567-573.

Joseph S.C. Lam, “An Earthly Capital,” in *Kunqu, the Classical Opera of Globalized China* (in review), 50 pages.

Week 6/Lecture 10. Kunqu and socialist China

Topic: Kunqu as social and political expressions

Viewing: *Shiwuguan* (Fifteen Strings of Cash; 125 minutes)

Reading:

A.C. Scott. "Fifteen Strings of Cash," in *Traditional Chinese Plays*, Vol. 2, 40, 109-121,132-146.

Colin Mackerras, *The Performance arts in Contemporary China*, 38-74.

Joseph Lam, "Escorting Lady Jing Home," *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, 46 (2014), 114-139.

Week 6/lecture 11. Kunqu and globalized China

Topic: Kunqu as an expression of China as a superpower and exporter of cultural heritages.

Viewing: *Taohuashan* (The Peach Blossom Fan; 180 minutes).

Reading:

Joseph Lam, "Chinese Music and Its Globalized Past and Present," *Macalester International*, 21 (2008), 29-77.

Kate Swatek, "Boundary Crossings: Peter Sellar's Production of *Peony Pavilion*," *Asian Theatre Journal*, 19/1 (Spring 2002), 147-158.

Chen Shih-hsiang and Harold Acton trans, *The Peach Blossom Fan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976); chapters to be assigned; about 50 printed pages.

Week 7/lecture 12. Kunqu as a discourse of Chinese *qingchun*.

Topic: China's *qingchun* self that is beautiful, young, talented, and privileged

Viewing: Scenes from Kenneth Pai's *Mudanting, the Young Lovers' Edition* (90 minutes)

Reading:

Joseph Lam, "The Price of Being *Qingchun*," Manuscript; 50 pages

Lindy Mark, *Peony Pavilion*, English translation of *Qingchun ban mudanting*; scenes to be assigned; 50 printed pages.

Week 7/lecture 13. A review or student presentations.

The course will arrange two field trips to Shanghai or Suzhou where students will attend live performance of kunqu. Timing of the field trips will be decided on performance schedules of Shanghai or Suzhou kunqu.

## Bibliography (optional)

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25 September 2015 version  
For Robisheaux Committee