

# The Study of the Qing Dynasty Yanyanyue

EMILY YI ZHANG \*

USC School of Dramatic Arts, University of Southern California. Los Angeles 90089, USA

\* Corresponding Author

**Abstract.** During the Qing dynasty, Yanyan Yue served as a backdrop to court ceremonies and a dynamic platform for cultural diplomacy. Innovations in banquet music during this period reflected a blend of Han Chinese and Manchu traditions, allowing the Qing court to celebrate its grandeur and sovereignty through these musical expressions. This paper summarizes the evolution of Yanyan Yue, especially the development of Yanyan Yue in the Qing Dynasty, and combs the composition of the musical instruments of Yanyan Yanyan Yue. The purpose is to illustrate the national development and integration in the Qing Dynasty through the changes in musical instruments.

**Keywords:** Yanyan Yue; Qing Dynasty; Asian Ethnic Music.

## 1. Introduction

Yanyue plays a significant role within the rich tapestry of China's cultural heritage, offering a unique glimpse into the harmonious blend of music, ritual, and imperial tradition that has flourished for multiple Chinese dynasties. As a category of court music traced back to the Zhou Dynasty, Yanyue is mainly used to entertain guests for leisure and recreational purposes. Throughout history, each dynasty has added its distinctive flavor to Yanyue. Specifically, Yanyan Yue, or banquet music, is a form of Yanyue that played a significant role in imperial feasts, court celebrations, and social gatherings. This form of Chinese imperial music has developed and showcased evolving Chinese musical traditions. Before the Qing dynasty, the banquets, including their associated music, were primarily used to adhere to rituals and display etiquette. The Ming dynasty, for instance, accentuated the Han Chinese cultural characteristics, resulting in relatively fewer assimilations of musical styles from neighboring countries and minority ethnicities. The focus was on formality, conservatism, and an emphasis on rituals. In contrast, the Qing dynasty rulers implemented a change in their cultural policy, and Yanyan Yue was a reflection of such changes. The Qing dynasty, ruled by the Manchu ethnic group, lasted 268 years from 1616 to 1911. After the Qing government was established in Beijing, the rulers aimed to consolidate their power, stabilize the government, and win the support of the people. Therefore, they did not impose their own ethnic music and ceremonial music system. Instead, they retained the complete set of ceremonial music from the Ming Dynasty. To adapt to the Qing Dynasty's court music, the early Qing government initiated reforms and improvements in the management of ceremonial music institutions. One musical change was pursuing a policy of cultural assimilation. Distinct from banquet music of previous dynasties, Qing Dynasty banquet music exhibited more multicultural characteristics. Common ensembles included those representing Mongolian, Manchu tribes, Korean, and other ethnic groups. These ensembles hailed from diverse regions and ethnic backgrounds, showcasing the strength and diversity of the Qing Dynasty. This multi-ethnic cultural exchange and fusion contributed to the distinctive character of Qing Dynasty Yanyan Yue, reflecting the era's vitality.

Western scholars have historically concentrated their research efforts on Qing dynasty Yayue, especially ritual music such as Zhonghe Shaoyue and Danbi Dayue. The oversight of the importance of researching Yanyue has left a gap in the academic understanding of this cultural phenomenon. Hence, this article aims to explore the development of Yanyan Yue and its significance as a reflection of the Qing Dynasty's cultural and political currents, mainly focusing on the composition of Yanyan Yue bands and their musical instruments. The development of Yanyan will be explored through multiple sections. The first section will begin by covering the evolution of banquet music from the

Zhou to Qing Dynasty. The second section will overlook the growth of Yanyan Yue in the Qing Dynasty, including banquet music during the reign of Emperor Shunzhi, Emperor Kangxi, and Emperor Qianlong and during the decline of the Qing Dynasty. The third section will focus on the composition of Yanyan Yue categories and the instruments used for each category. The last section will focus on the role and impact of banquet music in implementing conciliatory policies during the Qing dynasty.

## **2. Evolution of Yanyan Yue**

The origin of the imperial court can be traced back to the Western Zhou Dynasty. During the Western Zhou period, court music reached its zenith. During that time, the Zhou Dynasty established a dedicated institution for managing court music. It implemented a strict ritual music system, which significantly promoted the development of court music [1]. Significant palace banquet music events during this dynasty were the Yanli and Sheli. Sheli, the archery ritual, was a critical ceremonial practice during the Western Zhou and was one of five traditional Chinese etiquettes. Over time, archery evolved from being a mere skill to a significant ceremonial act, reflecting its shift from practical use to a political symbol [2]. This ritual involved archery competitions and served both ceremonial and practical purposes. Yanli, also known as the "Feast of Yan," was a ceremonial banquet in the Zhou Dynasty. It was an essential part of court rituals and ceremonies. The Yanli takes place at "Lu Qin," a highly prestigious palace banquet event, and involves feasting, music, and various forms of entertainment. It was a way for the ruling class to strengthen social bonds, show hospitality to visiting dignitaries, and maintain the unity of the realm. However, this ceremony had a rigorous ritual music system. The orchestra for the Yanli is set up on the upper west steps, slightly to the east. The lead musician enters first, followed by the other musicians. After the monarch and the high officials toast each other, the musicians playing the sheng enter and stand in the 'Yue Xuan' area. Following a series of drinking and merry-making procedures, the 'Zheng Ge,' one of the regulated pieces of music employed during rites, is completed, and the musicians return to their original positions to play music again. This series of ceremonial acts is interspersed with musical performances and is characterized by a high degree of formalization. Banquet music during the Zhou dynasty was not mere background accompaniment but an integral element of the ceremony as it marks transitions and underscores significant moments.

The Music Bureau managed music in the following Qin and Han dynasties. According to the Book of Han, the government of the Qin Dynasty set up two significant musical institutions: the Grand Music Office and the Music Bureau, which operated under the supervision of the Minister of Rituals and the Minister Steward, respectively. The Grand Music Office's primary role was to manage the music for ancestral temple rituals. In contrast, the Music Bureau's responsibilities included the instruction and execution of secular music for non-religious events [3]. In particular, the Han Music Bureau played a significant role in constructing and laying a solid foundation for developing traditional Chinese music [1].

Among the music managed by the bureau, one category was the 'Zhou Song Ya Yue,' which included Yanyan Yue, Sheli, and music for the food offering ceremony. Alongside the formalized court entertainment, a new form aimed towards the general public emerged. This collection of performance arts was called "Hundred Plays" and included a wide variety of folk arts such as acrobatics, magic, clowning, and games. It was a term used to describe street and folk performances primarily focused on entertainment and often showcased physical agility and skill feats. While the elite enjoyed structured entertainment and rituals, a Hundred Plays was considered entertainment for the masses. The Wei, Jin, Southern, and Northern Dynasties' periods were marked by constant warfare, and the duration of imperial reigns tended to be brief. During this time, 'Qing Shang San Diao,' the three principal musical modes of Qing Tunes, Ping Tunes, and Se Tunes, not only became a specific tune but also evolved to represent a genre of music. This musical concept provided a structured way to compose and perform music that adhered to that era's aesthetic and cultural values. Qing Shang, often abbreviated to Qing in the Sui and Tang eras, is a traditional Han Chinese musical style that originated

and gained preeminence during the Three Kingdoms era. It became a dominant musical expression through the Two Jin dynasties and well into the Southern and Northern Dynasties, reflecting the cultural dynamism of these periods.

In the Sui and Tang dynasties, court music represented the highest achievement in music culture at the time, holding a significant place in the kingdom's culture [1]. The Sui Dynasty, in particular, established a multi-part music system that categorized music by region and country. Establishing the multi-part music system was a milestone in ancient Chinese court music performance. It allowed the court banquet performance to have a complete system for the first time. For example, the court banquet performance system consisted of 'Seven-Part Music' and 'Nine-Part Music.' The perfection of the banquet performance system in the Sui Dynasty took the court banquet performance to a new level. In the Tang dynasty, banquet music, particularly the Yanyue, was a sophisticated courtly affair managed by the Yuebu, an official music system. This system reflected the historical transmission of traditional Chinese music and represented a structured organization within the court. The repertoire of the Yuebu was an amalgamation of various musical cultures from the Han to the Tang dynasties, legally recognized and categorized under the "Yuelin" (law on music) [4].

In the Song and Yuan dynasties, the imperial music scene evolved to incorporate a greater variety of folk elements, giving rise to a unique genre known as "Song-Yuan court music." Over time, as societal preferences and cultural dynamics evolved, court music increasingly mirrored popular tastes and showcased more diverse music [1]. This trend became particularly pronounced in the Yuan era, as the Mongol Empire conquered the Chinese Song Dynasty, and a foreign power ruled China. There are three general court banquet music. The first comprises traditional Han Chinese instruments such as the sheng (a reed pipe instrument), zheng (a plucked zither), and xiao (a bamboo flute). The second class includes traditional Mongolian instruments from the Yuan Dynasty's ethnic heritage. The third class consists of instruments introduced from abroad, such as the Xinglong sheng. These categories reflect the start of the cultural influence of the ruling Mongols and their gradual introduction of foreign instruments into Chinese music. Transitioning into the Ming Dynasty, the Han Chinese reclaimed control from the Mongols. The influence of Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism accentuated Han Chinese cultural characteristics, causing relatively fewer musical elements and instruments assimilations from neighboring countries and ethnic minorities. The musical focused on values such as formality and conservatism, emphasizing rituals [5]. The Ming emperors attached great importance to grand banquets and used a nine-part music system during feasts, which played a role in both wine and food service processes. Major banquets were held on specific occasions, such as New Year's Day, Winter Solstice, and the Grand Celebration, with the Hall of Heavenly Purity as the venue [6]. The Manchu rulers who later ruled the Qing era sought to strengthen their reign by embracing the cultural heritage of their subjects rather than imposing their own musical and ceremonial traditions. This approach caused the pursuit of a more inclusive and multicultural cultural policy, including showcasing ensembles from Mongolian, Manchu, Korean, and other ethnic origins, symbolizing the empire's vast cultural mosaic. In conclusion, court banquet music serves as a historical lens, mirroring the political and cultural changes. Through its evolution, court banquet music tells the story of ruling dynasties and chronicles the interplay between power, art, and the people it served.

### **3. The Development of Yanyan Yue in Qing Dynasty**

#### **3.1. Qing Dynasty Yanyan Yue Development Overview**

The Qing Dynasty, the final chapter in the long history of feudal China, was a period of profound cultural and political significance. Under Qing rule, which lasted from 1616 to 1911, court banquet music, or Yanyan Yue, evolved into a vehicle for political expression and a reflection of the empire's complex societal structures. The rulers of the Qing Dynasty, originating from the Manchu ethnic group, leveraged the arts, including music, as a tool of politics, thus marking a departure from the original lyrical essence of court music. It served as a means for the rulers to exhibit their dominance and authority, often overshadowing its role as a source of entertainment and leisure, particularly

within the inner court life. The Qing rulers promoted a version of courtly music that was distinctively Manchu, incorporating elements such as horsemanship and archery while simultaneously assimilating musical influences from a myriad of nations and ethnic backgrounds [6]. This resulted in a distinctive form of Yanyan Yue that was a fusion of various cultural elements.

The early Qing period saw the Manchu rulers succeeding the Ming Dynasty, and it was during the reigns of Emperor Shunzhi and Emperor Kangxi that Yanyan Yue began to diversify. Emperor Kangxi, himself an accomplished musician, played a pivotal role in enriching the musical tradition by infusing Manchu styles into the existing Han repertoire. This initiative was more than artistic; it was a strategic effort to unite the Manchu rulers with their Han subjects through the shared experience of music. The development of Yanyan Yue reached its pinnacle during Emperor Qianlong's reign. With a profound appreciation for the arts, Qianlong's era was characterized by an expansion of musical compositions and performances, reflecting the Huairou policies that aimed to unite the Qing's vast multi-ethnic empire [7]. The integration of musical elements from various regions such as Tibet, Mongolia, and Xinjiang, along with the introduction of instruments like the dombra and maroquin, led to a rich, textured musical landscape. However, as the Qing Dynasty's power started to decline, so did the vibrancy of Yanyan Yue. The grandeur of Qianlong's court was unsustainable; political corruption, internal strife, and external pressures led to the music's deterioration. The innovation and integration that had previously flourished began to wane, and by the reign of the last emperor, Puyi, Yanyan Yue had become a relic of the past.

In retrospect, the progression of Yanyan Yue through the Qing Dynasty encapsulates the era's broader cultural and political narrative. From its inception as a purely Han Chinese art form to its zenith of inclusivity under Qianlong, and eventually, to its decline, Yanyan Yue not only served as entertainment but also acted as a barometer for the shifting tides of the times.

### **3.2. The Composition of Yanyan Yue Bands and Musical Instruments in the Qing Dynasty**

*The Yu Zhi Lv Lv Zheng Yi Hou Bian* is a comprehensive Qing Dynasty court music anthology, spanning 122 volumes with additional imperial decrees. Compiled under Emperor Qianlong and published in 1746, it contains a detailed collection of musical compositions, instruments, theory, and practice, complete with scores and lyrics. This work is a culmination of the court's musical development and stands as a milestone in the history of Chinese imperial music. As documented in this anthology, the classification of musical instruments is separated into eight categories of musical on their materials [8]. The materials include silk, bamboo, wood, stone, metal, clay, gourd, and skin. The silk instruments had twisted silk for strings that could be plucked, strung, or bowed. Silk instruments include guqin and se. Bamboo instruments are created from bamboo and usually refer to woodwind instruments such as chi. Wood instruments include percussions like zhu and yu. Qing and bianqing are made from stones, and chimes such as Zhong and ling are considered metal instruments. Both wind instruments like xun and percussion instruments like fou could be made from clay. Gourds can be made into wind instruments such as sheng, and skins can be made into drums called gu. These instruments were not only tuned according to the standards of the twelve pitches, but these standards also determined their sizes and shapes. These standards must be strictly adhered to, especially for silk and bamboo instruments, which are considered the most essential due to their role in leading the orchestra. *The Imperially Commissioned Lü Lü Zhengyi Houbian* also emphasizes that although the construction and tuning of musical instruments have evolved over time, the fundamental principles that govern their design and the harmony they create have remained unchanged [8].

Yanyan Yue in the Qing Dynasty included a variety of traditional musical styles and bands, some of which are associated with different ethnic groups or regions within or neighboring Qing China. These music styles often utilize traditional instruments unique to their culture or region, and they may include specific forms of musical composition and performance practice. The nine different Yanyan Yue bands include Duiwu Yue, Menggu Yue, Warka Yue, Huibu Yue, Fanzi Yue, Chaoxian Yue, Gorkha Yue, Burmese traditional music, and Annan traditional music. Duiwu Yue refers to a form of music and dance performance that involves a group or a "team" of dancers performing to music.

This category of Yanyan Yue comprises four categories of dances. The Qinglong Dance celebrated the prosperity and longevity of the Qing Dynasty or the reign of the Qing Dynasty emperors during the occasion of a banquet. It was performed during grand celebrations such as the New Year, the Emperor's Birthday, New Year's Eve, and the Emperor's wedding. The dance involved thirty-two performers with an accompaniment of up to a hundred musicians. Furthermore, the dance was an imitation of the Manchu hunting activities and a tribute to the ancestors' valor in battle. Unlike the Qinglong Dance, which was suitable for all court celebrations, the other two dances required more specific occasions. The Shide Dance was commonly seen at banquets for the royal family and nobility. Originally choreographed by Emperor Qianlong as a tribute to his ancestors and to commemorate their noble deeds, this dance was arranged similarly to the Xiqi Dance and performed by eighteen people. The Desheng Dance, on the other hand, was performed at banquets celebrating triumphant military campaigns and composed of eighteen performers. It glorified the emperor and his soldiers' heroic spirit in battle and defense of the nation's frontiers [9]. The Duiwu Yue band comprises plucked zithers, xiqin, pipa, sanxian, jie, and pai. The remaining eight bands play during banquets.

Menggu Yue, or Mongolian music, played a significant role in the cultural and ceremonial practices of the Qing Dynasty, reflecting the ruling Manchu class's historical and cultural connections with the Mongols. The Manchu's incorporation of this music into Qing court life underscored their recognition and celebration of the empire's diverse ethnic tapestry. The performance of such music, including Jiachui, required an array of traditional instruments such as the hujia, huqin, Yatuoke, and mouth harp, each performed by a dedicated musician. In a display of formality and respect, the musicians would make a ceremonial entrance, bow, kneel on one knee, and commence their performance. Additionally, a subset of Mongolian music known as Fan Bu He Zou (Name of the piece) featured a diverse array of instruments, including the pipe, sheng, flute, xiao, yun'ao, Yatuoke, pipa, sanxian, huo bu si, ya zheng, huqin, yueqin, erxian, tiqin, and paiban, played by a group of fifteen musicians [10]. Mongolian music's prominence during the Qing era not only illustrated the empire's ethnically pluralistic character but also served as a diplomatic gesture of unity and an acknowledgment of shared history. It was a testament to the Qing court's deep appreciation for the rich tapestry of artistic traditions within its realm.

Fanzi Yue represents a genre that originated during the Qing Dynasty's Qianlong era. It came into being after the empire's successful pacification of the Jinchuan area, from which the music was assimilated. Subsequently, when the Panchen Lama from Tibet visited the imperial court, he offered his region's music to the emperor. These musical contributions were incorporated into the court's banquet music collection and were collectively known as Fanzi Yue. Instruments used in this genre include de li, bai qie er, de le wo, ba wang, cang qing, long si ma er de le wo. Additionally, Huibu Yue refers to the music associated with the Hui people or other Muslim communities within China during historical periods. The band consists of da bu , na ge la , ha er zha ke, ka er nai , sai ta er, la ba bu, ba la man, and su er nai. Warka Yue was also used at court banquets after the Later Jin Dynasty conquered the Warka tribes. The instruments used included four bili and four xiqin.

The following bands are all brought into the imperial court from neighboring countries and regions. The musical groups were composed of members from various regions and ethnicities, illustrating the Qing Dynasty's broad reach and diversity within its borders. This blend of multi-ethnic traditions and interactions enriched the distinctiveness of the Qing Dynasty's Yanyan Yue, embodying the vibrancy of the period. Firstly, Annan refers to what is known today as Vietnam. Historically, the term Annan was used in Chinese to denote the region that was once a part of Imperial China and later became a tributary state during various Chinese dynasties. Annan music includes gai gu, gai pai, gai, gai tan xian zi, gai tan hu qin, gai tan shuang yun, gai tan pipa, and gai san yin luo. Secondly, the North Korean music band consists of pipe, flute, and pai gu. Third, Burma music includes ba da la, zha, zong gao ji, mi qigong zong, da yue zong, bu lei, and Jie zu. And lastly, Gorkha music consists of si da bu la, sa lang ji, dan bu la, and da la zhe.

During the Qing dynasty, Yanyan Yue served as a backdrop to court ceremonies and a dynamic platform for cultural diplomacy. Innovations in banquet music during this period reflected a blend of

Han Chinese and Manchu traditions, allowing the Qing court to celebrate its grandeur and sovereignty through these musical expressions.

Moreover, the Qing Dynasty's adoption of Huairou policies, which aimed to integrate the empire's ethnic minorities and fortify the multi-ethnic fabric of the state, found a voice in the banquet halls [7]. The inclusive selection of musical elements from diverse ethnicities within Yanyan Yue was a deliberate act of respect and a tool for fostering unity. This melodic inclusivity contributed to harmonious relations among the Han Chinese and minority groups, echoing the empire's overarching objectives of unity and the quelling of potential discord.

The Imperially Commissioned Lǔ Lǔ Zhengyi Houbian provides evidence of the Qing court's dedication to cultural innovation and preservation. While embracing new musical influences, the court ensured the continuation of traditional Han Chinese musical tenets [11]. This strategic cultivation of Yanyan Yue achieved a dual purpose: it expanded the court's cultural repertoire and simultaneously bolstered the dynasty's legitimacy by venerating the Han Chinese cultural legacy. Such a thoughtful amalgamation of novelty and tradition in banquet music did more than entertain; it played a pivotal role in sculpting the Qing Dynasty's cultural and political narrative, fostering a collective identity and allegiance to the emperor.

#### 4. Conclusion

The paper meticulously traces the evolution of Yanyan Yue, highlighting its significance in the Qing Dynasty's cultural politics. From its origins to its zenith under Emperor Qianlong and its eventual decline, Yanyan Yue mirrored the empire's trajectory. Combining multicultural musical elements under the Huairou policies showcased the Qing's expansive power and cultural confidence. However, this vibrancy faded as the dynasty waned, reflecting broader political and societal shifts. The paper argues that Yanyan Yue was more than entertainment; it was a cultural barometer and a tool for unity, capturing the essence of China's last imperial era.

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