

# The Art of “Chakedahun” in the Poetic Drama Themed with Buddhism Deliverance in the Ming Dynasty: Taking Zen Master Yu and Red Lotus as Examples

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## ABSTRACT

“Chakedahun” (comical language and actions) is an indispensable part of Chinese opera. In recent years, researches have focused on “Chakedahun” in Yuan poetic drama and Ming legendary opera, while ignoring the use of “Chakedahun” in Ming poetic drama. Furthermore, compared with common Ming poetic drama, the use of “KeHun” in drama themed with Buddhism deliverance has some unique characteristics. Therefore, this paper, would like to fill the gap and provide a special perspective for the study of the “KeHun” in “Ming Buddhism deliverance poetic drama” through a specific comparison and analysis of the “Chakedahun” in Red Lotus Debt and Zen master Yu. And in this process, this article will focus on the principle of “Chakedahun” and the methods of changing from vulgarity to elegance. Finally, this article will summarize the characteristics of the “Chakedahun” in “Ming Buddhism deliverance poetic drama”.

**Keywords:** *drama, Chakedahun. Buddhism deliverance, vulgarity, elegance.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

“Chakedahun” (插科打诨), abbreviated as “KeHun” (科诨), is a kind of expressive skill commonly used in Chinese operas to create comic effects. The term “Ke” (科) here refers to comical actions, and the “Hun” (诨) here refers to comical language, which is similar as buffoonery. And Ke Hun's basic functions in Chinese opera is to attract audiences and create a joyous atmosphere. Thus, “KeHun”, to some extent, determines the success of a Chinese opera performance.

In recent years, most attention has been drawn to the “KeHun” in Yuan poetic drama(元杂剧) and Ming legendary opera(明传奇), while the use and changes of “KeHun” in Ming poetic drama(明杂剧) are ignored. For example, in "The Art of Chakedahun in Yuan poetic drama", Guo Weiting made a specific analysis and sorting out of the origin, distribution, use, symbol connotation, and skill classification of “Chakedahun” in Yuan poetic drama, but he did not mention the development of “Chakedahun” in the Ming poetic drama [1]. Similarly, in "A Comparison of Yuan opera's buffoonery with those of Ming opera", Song

Lingyan analyzed and compared the “Chakedahun” art in Yuan poetic drama and Ming Legend, and pointed out the changes in the themes and carriers of the two, but she did not mention the “Kehun” in Ming poetic drama [2]. As a result, an important part of the changes of “KeHun” in the history of Chinese opera has been missed. Besides that, compared with common Ming poetic drama, due to the influence of scared religious ideas, the use of vulgar “KeHun” in the Ming poetic drama themed with Buddhism deliverance has some unique characteristics, which provides an interesting way of coexistence of elegance and vulgarity.

This paper, therefore, is an attempt to fill the gap and provide a special perspective for the study of the “KeHun” in “Buddhism deliverance poetic drama” in the Ming dynasty. In order to achieve these goals, I specially selected two representative Buddhism deliverance poetic dramas-Zen Master Yu and Red Lotus Debt which could respectively represent the first-class works and second-class works of Ming poetic drama. And through specific analysis and comparison of “KeHun” in these two works, this paper not only demonstrates the use of “KeHun” in the Ming Dynasty's poetic drama themed with Buddhism deliverance, but

also explores the strategy of turning the vulgar into elegant.

Considering the influence and restrictions of the role of opera on “KeHun”, the structure of this paper is as follows: it starts by analyzing clown(丑角) ‘s KeHun in the two dramas. Then it explores the changes and differences of the KeHun of “ShengJue” (生角, The leading male character types in Chinese operas) and “DanJue” (旦角, The leading female character types in Chinese operas). Finally, it summarizes the characteristics of “KeHun” in the Ming Dynasty’s Buddhism deliverance poetic drama, and discusses how to use vulgar KeHun to create an elegant atmosphere or express profound religious ideas.

## **2. FROM CONFLICT AND SECULARITY TO LAUGHTER: CLOWN’S “KEHUN”**

The poetic drama of the Ming Dynasty mainly consists of three parts: songs, narrations and stage actions. Thus, the carrier of “Hun” (buffoonery) is song and narration, and the carrier of “Ke” (comical actions) is stage actions. Due to the limitation of clown's functions and characters, clown’s “Hun” is mostly narration and clown’s “Ke” is all stage actions. And according to the research in this paper, there are two main principles to produce “KeHun”: conflicts and Secularity. Conflicts mainly include language logic conflicts and situational conflicts. Situational conflicts can be divided into three parts. One is the context conflict; the second is the micro-environment of the language conflict, including the theme, expression, location, and the relationship between the two sides of the dialogue; the third is the macro-environment of the language conflict, including society, history, and culture background etc [3]. As for the secularity, it mainly includes vulgarism, vulgar things, slang and “Xiehouyu”(歇后语, A two-part allegorical saying, of which the first part, always stated, is descriptive; while the second part, sometimes unstated, carries the message.). In the following, I will make a specific analysis of the clown’s “KeHun” based on the combination of the carriers and principles.

In Chen Ruyuan’s Red Lotus Debt, the author mainly uses situational conflicts, vulgarism and vulgar things to produce clowns’ “Hun” (comical language). For example, in the third act of the Red Lotus Debt, when the “ShengJue” Su Shi asks the people around him what is in his belly, the maid Jichu, as a clown, uses “smelly shit” to make “Hun”.

Su (touches his belly and asks): Maids, what do you think is in my belly?

Ji: It’s a smelly shit!

Yang: It’s a lot of knowledge.

Su: It’s not.

Qing: It is a full-fledged way of governing the state and helping the people!

Su: It’s also not.

Yun: It is something that is not in line with the trend of the times.

Su: This is correct![4]

Compared with the other three answers, Ji Chu’s answer adopts the vulgar thing "smelly shit", which produce a huge contrast with its context. And when the audience perceives this contrast, the comedic effect is produced.

Another “Hun” is also made in the third act of the Red Lotus debt, but mainly uses the language’s micro-environment and macro-environment to create conflicts.

The crowd play Taoist nuns and Buddhist nuns and get on the stage: The monk is what I like, and the Taoist priest is what I want. My “Tao” can be filled with lust, and my “Tao” can be explained by robbery.

(Approaches and salutes) Beg the lord for alms!

Su: hateful! Just drove away the monks and Taoists, you come again!

Ji: What are you used to eating?

The crowd: Can't sell mussels in the waist, I love loach in the legs.

Su: Get out!

The crowd: I will put my heart to the bright moon, who knows that the bright moon shines on the ditch![4]

Everyone knows that nuns are a sacred profession. Due to religious requirements, they must strictly restrict their behavior. However, here, the Taoist nuns and Buddhist nuns not only arbitrarily alter the original religious scriptures, for example, changing “The Tao that can be explained is not the real Tao ” to “ Tao can be explained by robbery.”; they also bluntly talk about sex between men and women, for instance, “the monk is what I like” and “I love loach in the legs”, loach here refers to the penis. And all those just mentioned conflict with the traditional image of nuns (micro-environment) and the society’s requirements for nuns (macro-environment) greatly. And when the audience realizes this contrast, the comic effect will be produced.

Different from the Hun in Red Lotus Debt, in the first act of Zen Master Yu, the clown mainly uses language logic conflict to create “Hun”.

The lazy Taoist comes on stage and says: I went to the hall yesterday to ask for ginger. The master said that the tiger was being driven at the foot of the mountain, and I was too scared to come back to sleep. I wonder what happened to that woman? Yeah! The woman

disappeared. Yeah! The master passed away. Strange! What is the reason for this? I know, it was a “Guanyin” (a Bodhisattva) who instructed the master to go (The “go”, here, means death and going to the world where the Lord Buddha is). Yeah! There is a letter under the incense burner.

(reads) Yeah! It turns out that this woman is the prostitute Honglian! It was official Liu who sent her to set this trap, and my master lost his virginity! This letter is in response to Liu’s words. [5]

In this episode, the lazy Taoist first thought that Zen Master Yutong was instructed to go to the world where the Buddha is. But after reading the master’s letter, he realized that the master had violated Buddhist precepts and committed suicide in shame. As a result, the language before and after is contradictory, which creates a big contrast. Through this contrast, not only the plot of the foreplay monk’s violation of the precepts is re-summarized, but also the tragedy of the death of the Zen master is diluted, which produces an effect of tears in laughter.

In general, the main role of the clown’s “KeHun” is to adjust the atmosphere and make the audience laugh, but in the works of some first-class writers, the vulgar “KeHun” sometimes also carries some different philosophical connotations.

### **3. FROM VULGARITY TO ELEGANCE: “SHENGJUE” AND “DANJUE”’S“KEHUN”**

Compared with clown’s “KeHun”, the “KeHun” of “ShengJue” and “DanJue” are usually more elegant, due to their role restrictions. And from vulgar to elegant, there are three main ways: side description (The description of the surrounding people or the environment to express the object that needs to be described), metaphor and parody (a piece of writing, music, acting, that deliberately copies the style of sb/ sth in order to be amusing).

First of all, this article will discuss side description. In the songs of the first act of the Red Lotus Debt, the monk Wujie uses side descriptions to make Hun.

[Zhuo Lu Shu] ((拙鲁速, a song name): .... Don't be envious of the Altair and Vega (In China, the two stars symbolize a couple who are separated by The Milky Way” and can only meet once a year) , fluke on the pillow, bumping in the quilt. You are the internal family member, and the internal family member also enjoys the same. [4]

In this song, “ShengJue”, the monk Wu Jie does not directly describe sex, but uses side descriptions, such as " fluke on the pillow, bumping in the quilt" and “the internal family member also enjoys the same” to imply sex. In this way, the monk Wu Jie not only creates Hun

through situational conflicts, but also reflects his cultural qualities to a certain extent.

Similarly, in another song of the first act of the red lotus debt, the Zen Master Wu Jie uses a metaphor to make “Hun”.

[Holy Medicine King] (圣药王, a song name) :.....I want him to look at the futon with me, turning the clouds and raining till dawn. Only then does I believe that the marriage was arranged long ago, and it was achieved in a moment.[4]

In the lyrics, Zen Master Wujie also does not talk about the sexual behavior directly, instead using “cloud and rain “as a metaphor for the sexual behavior. It is said that in ancient China, the king ChuHuai (楚怀王) encountered the goddess of Wu Mountain in his dream and had sex with her, while visiting YunMeng Lake. When the goddess was leaving, she said to King Chuhuai: "I am on a steep high slope of the south Wu Mountain. In the morning, I am a cloud; and in the evening, I am an erratic rain.” Zen Master Wujie quotes this story and uses "cloud and rain" to symbolize sex between men and women, which makes his words more elegant.

Regarding parody, it is often used in Zen Master Yu. For example, this skill is used in the narration of Zen Master Yutong.

“Sheng Jue” plays Yutong and gets on the stage:.....Slander Bodhidharma who conveyed the Buddha's realm by heart rather than words, and faced the wall for nine years, but was just in a “SiLinQin” (死林侵, vulgarism, means daze)and practiced blindly. It's like the leaves don't return to the roots until they fall. Laugh at Hui Ke (A disciple of Bodhidharma), who blindly sought his heart, and read thousands of scriptures, but was still”HuTu”(胡突, Homophonic words, means confused), and quarreling for his confusion, which caused flowers to fall from the sky? .....[5]

In this narration, Monk Yutong uses folk vulgarism and homonyms with negative meaning, like “SiLinQin” and “HuTu”, to criticize the representatives and thoughts of Zen Buddhism. While he denies the penance behavior of the representatives of Zen Buddhism, he also highlights the importance of the Zen concept of "instant revelation". In fact, this is a secret expression of the author's understanding of Buddhist concepts. And this kind of special philosophical thinking produced by parody, not only changes the vulgarity into elegance, but also brings a different feeling to the audience, making them think while laughing.

Finally, this paper will discuss a case where “Ke “and “Hun” cooperates with each other perfectly to create a strong comedy effect. In the second act of Zen Master Yu, in order to enlighten Liu Cui and let her

understand her past and present lives, Monk Moonlight performs a pantomime. However, Liu Cui, the “DanJue” fails to grasp the meaning of pantomime, and is still limited in her current identity and metempsychosis.

Liu: Master, I can't guess so many things, just tell me directly.

(The Monk Moonlight hurriedly pulls on Liu Cui's earring and mimes a finger-guessing

Game-Cai Quan(猜拳).

Liu: Let me guess again? You can make another gesture.

(The monk pointed at the center of his eyebrows.)

Liu: This is the head again.

(The monk shakes his hand, widens his eyes angrily, and points at the center of his brows again.)

Liu: It's not the head, but annoyed.

(The monk wears a woman's mask and points to the center of his brows.)

Liu: Be angry at this woman.

(The monk takes off the woman's mask, puts on the official gauze hat, and points at the center of his eyebrows again.)

Liu: Why are you angry at this official instead? what does that mean?

(The monk points to himself and then to his head.)

Liu: Are you angry again?

(The monk shakes his hand.)

Liu: If it's not angry, it still represents the head.[5]

In this plot, the monk's hard performance and Liu Cui's confusion creates a strong situational contrast. While this contrast induces the audience to laugh, it also triggers the about the concepts of Buddhist “persistence”, “personal identity” and “reincarnation”. When the audience laugh at audience's thinking the confusion of Liu Cui from the perspective of God, they might suddenly wonder: Am I the same as Liu Cui?

In summary, due to the limitation of the role image, opera writers often use side descriptions, metaphors and parody to make “ShengJue” and “Danjue”'s “Hun” more elegant. Among these methods, parody is the most

special. Chinese Opera writers often use this writing skill to make the protagonist imitate the language and behavior style of the people at the bottom of society, which usually forms a strong contrast with protagonist's characters and some sacred viewpoints. While the opera performance produces ironic and comic effects, some unique thinking is also contained in it.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, comparing to the “KeHun” in Yuan poetic drama. the carrier of “KeHun” in Ming poetic drama has increased. Due to the increase of songs in stage performances and the further development of the character singing system, songs have also become one of the important carriers for “KeHun”. In addition, in Ming Buddhism deliverance poetic drama, the themes of monks' violation of the precepts and “ideologism”, like clinging to money, clinging to beauty and clinging to identity, are often the basis for the creation of “KeHun”. But the core of these themes is still conflict and secularity.

Last but not least, in the process of changing from vulgarity to elegance, first-class authors, like Xu Wei, can often make “KeHun” that conforms to the characteristics of the characters, while perfectly blending into the general lyrics and narration of the text, and some of the author's thoughts are also implied. This is an advanced realm that is difficult for ordinary authors to achieve.

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