

วิจิตรศิลป์แห่งโรงจิ้วสามชั้นช่างอินเก่อ

三層大戲臺暢音閣之精奇

Marvel of the Three-Tiered Stage:

the Pleasant Sound Pavilion



Sasiporn Petcharapiruch¹

บทคัดย่อ:

โรงจิ้วสามชั้น หรือ เหลียนชี่ไก ถือเป็นวัตถุกรรมทางสถาปัตยกรรมโรงละครสมัยจักรพรรดิเฉียนหลง ซึ่งเป็นขุคทองของการแสดงจิ้วในสมัยราชวงศ์ชิง จักรพรรดิเฉียนหลงทรงมีพระราชโองการให้มีการก่อสร้างโรงจิ้วสามชั้นถึงสี่แห่ง ในจำนวนนี้สามแห่งได้ถูกทำลายแห่งเดียวที่ยังคงอยู่จนถึงปัจจุบัน คือ โรงจิ้วสามชั้นชื่อ ช่างอินเก่อ ตั้งอยู่ในพระราชวังดองห้าม โรงจิ้วสามชั้นแห่งนี้สะท้อนถึงจุดเด่นของการแสดงจิ้วในพระราชวังสมัยราชวงศ์ชิง กล่าวได้ว่าเป็นการผสมผสานของศาสตร์และศิลป์แขนงต่างๆ เช่นสถาปัตยกรรมภายนอกอันวิจิตรพิสดาร การตกแต่งภายในที่ละเอียดอ่อนงดงาม บทความฉบับนี้ครอบคลุมปฐมบท ประวัติศาสตร์ และการวิเคราะห์สถาปัตยกรรมทั้งภายนอกและภายในของโรงจิ้วสามชั้นช่างอินเก่อ จุดประสงค์เพื่อให้

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ເຫັນໃຈສາປັດຍກຣມເກົ່າແກ່ອັນນີ້ເອກລັກຍົ່ງຂອງຈິນ

ຄໍາສຳຄັນ: ໂຮງຈົວສາມໜັ້ນ ສນັບເນືຍນຫລງ ສາປັດຍກຣມ ຈົ່ວລວງ

摘要:

三層大戲臺（或稱“崇臺三層”，“連戲臺”）是清朝宮廷戲劇鼎盛時期—乾隆時期—中國戲劇建築上的一項創新。乾隆皇帝下令修建了四所這樣規模宏偉的戲臺，其中三所今已不存。唯一幸存的一座是故宮里的暢音閣。這座三層大戲臺反映了當時清代宮廷戲劇的精巧。它融異常壯麗的外部建築、設計精致的內部裝飾於一體。本文之範圍將涵蓋對於暢音閣戲臺之介紹、對其歷史之描述、以及其建築內外之分析。宗旨在於通過這座現存的三層大戲臺來了解乾隆時期中國古代建築及其奇特性。

關鍵詞：三層大戲臺、乾隆時期、建築、宮廷戲劇

Abstract:

The “three-tiered stage” *chongtai sanceng* 崇臺三層 (or the “linked performance stage” *lian xitai* 連戲臺) was an innovation of Chinese theatrical architecture during the Qianlong reign (1736-1796), a heyday of court theater in the Qing dynasty. The Qianlong emperor commissioned the construction of four such gigantic theaters, of which three are no longer extant. The only one still in existence is the three-tiered stage the Pleasant Sound Pavilion (*Changyin ge* 暢音閣) in the Forbidden City. This three-tiered stage reflected an ingenuity of the Qing court theater. It synthesizes an unusually-majestic exterior architecture, intricately-designed interior decoration. The scope of this article will cover an introduction, a history, and an analysis of exterior



and interior architecture of the three-tiered stage the Pleasant Sound Pavilion. My goal is to use this extant three-tiered stage as a way to understand traditional Chinese architecture and its ingenuity in the Qianlong reign.

Keywords: three-tiered stage, Qianlong reign, architecture, court theatre

Introduction

The three-floored building, a hundred winding stone steps; above is the blue sky; below is boundless.

On the upper stage there are standing and sitting actors; whereas on the lower stage hundreds of performances are being performed for the Emperor.

Amid the coiling up sky and the boundary of the earth, it is not enough to name all of them. (The Emperor) specially bestows a gala performance named the “Peaceful Times.”

Its music always concerns the affairs of people. And yet it is not merely for the birthday celebration and for helping the world.

Today the myriad nations ascend the Spring Platform,² come quickly to see the “Precious Raft” descending from the Heaven.

三層樓，百盤砌，上千清雲下無際。
上有立部伎、坐部伎，其下回黃陳百戲。

² *Chun tai* refers to the peaceful and prosperous time.



蟠天際地不足名，特賜大樂名升平。
考聲動復關民事，不特壽人兼濟世。
萬方一日登春台，快看寶筏從天來。³

This poem is composed by Hong Liangji 洪亮吉 (1746-1809), one of the greatest poets during the Qing dynasty. It talks about the performance of the *Shengping baofa* 升平寶筏 or *The Precious Raft of the Peaceful Times*, one of the rewritten plays commissioned by Qianlong emperor, in a three-tiered stage during the fiftieth year of the Qianlong reign (1790). The poem gives us a glimpse of the grand court theater during the Qing dynasty. Here “the three-floored building” refers to “the three-tiered stage,” an innovation of Chinese court theater during the Qing era.

The popularity of Qing court theater reached its zenith during the Qianlong era (1736-96). One architectural innovation that characterized this period was the creation of the “three-tiered stage” (*chongtai sanceng* 崇臺三層 or the “linked performance stage” (*lian xitai* 連戲臺)). The Qianlong emperor commissioned the construction of four such gigantic theaters, of which three are no longer extant.⁴

³ Hong Liangji, *Hong beijiang shi wen ji* 洪北江詩文集 [Poetry and Prose Collections of Hong Beijiang], 3 Vols. (Shangwu Yinshuguan, 1935), p. 75. Also cited in Zhao Shanlin 趙山林, *Zhongguo xiqu guanzhong xue* 中國戲曲觀衆學 [Study of Audience of Chinese Drama] (Huadong shifan daxue chubanshe, 1990), p. 123.

⁴ One was a three-tiered stage built in the Longevity Peaceful Palace (*Shou'an gong* 壽安宮); another was a three-tiered stage in the Mutual Pleasure Garden (*Tongle yuan* 同樂園) in the Old Summer Palace *Yuanming yuan* 圓明園; the other was the three-tiered stage the Clear Sound Pavilion (*Qingyin ge* 清音閣) built in the Fortune Longevity Garden (*Fushou yuan* 福壽園) in the Jehol Summer Palace (*Rehe xinggong* 热河行宮).



The only one still in existence is the Pleasant Sound Pavilion (*Changyin ge* 嘉音閣) in the Forbidden City (Fig. 1 a- 1 b).⁵ And this three-tiered stage will be the main focus in this article.



Fig. 1 a. Front view of the Pleasant Sound Pavilion three-tiered stage. Photo from Lang Xiuhsa, *Zhongguo gudai diwang yu liyuan shihua*, cover page.

Reading Hong's poem while looking at the pictures, one might find that the description of Hong's poem perfectly matches the pictures of this massive, three-tiered stage. Thus in this article, I will first discuss the historical background of the Pleasant Sound Pavilion and

⁵ The other extant three-tiered stage is the Garden of Harmonized Virtue (*Dehe yuan* 德和園) built in the twentieth year of the Guangxu 光緒 reign (1894).

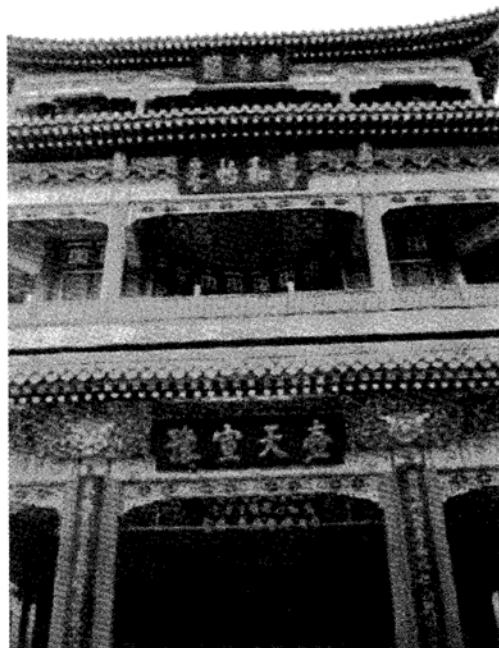


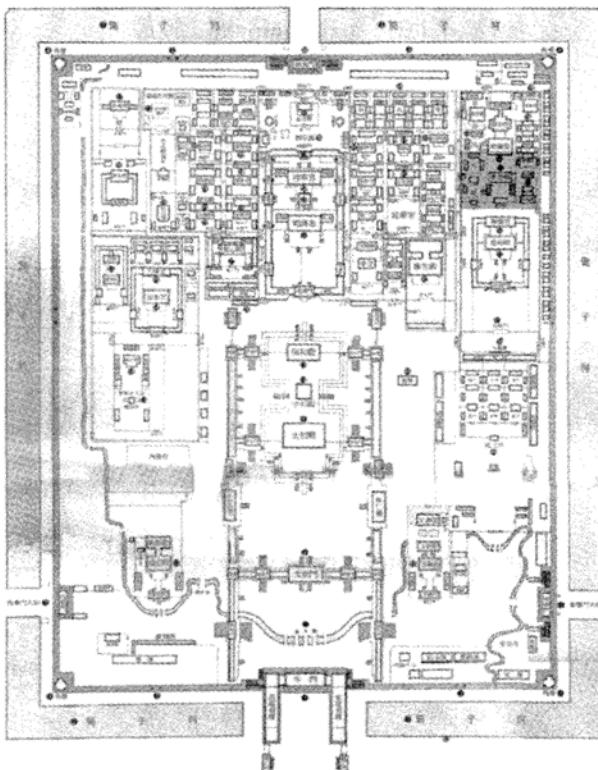
Fig. 1 b. Front view of the Pleasant Sound Pavilion three-tiered stage. Photo taken at the Pleasant Sound Pavilion by Sasiporn Petcharapiruch on November 11, 2004.

its placement within the Forbidden City. I will then focus on the architecture of the Pleasant Sound Pavilion as a theater and will analyze the layout of each of its three floors.

History and Layout of the Three-tiered Stage the Pleasant Sound Pavilion

In its time, the Pleasant Sound Pavilion was a recreational building and a venue for the court theatrical performances. Constructed in a palatial compound named “Palace for Living Out My Years in Peace” (*Ningshou gong* 寧壽宮) located in the outer perimeter of the

northeastern quadrant in the Forbidden City (see map 1),⁶ it was a site where the Qianlong emperor intended to celebrate his sixtieth birthday

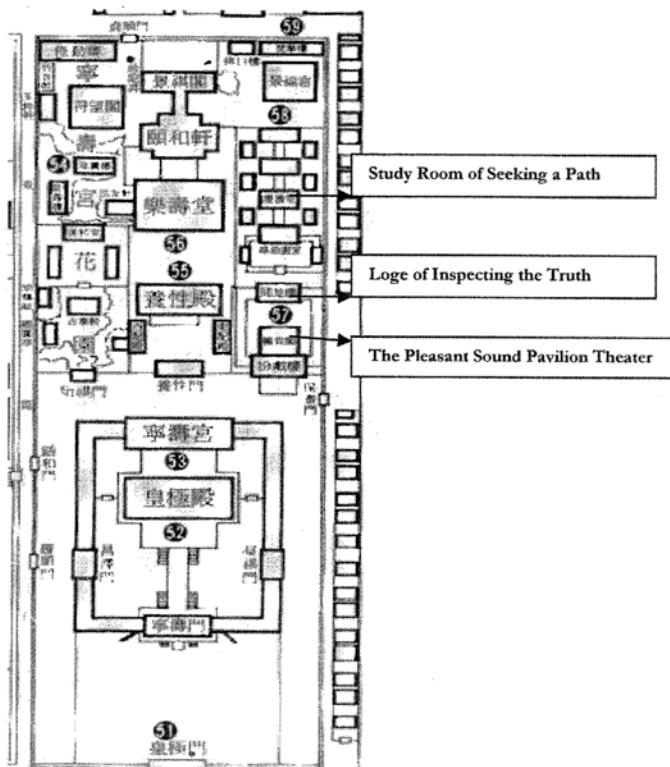


Map 1. The layout of the Forbidden City. Photo from Yu Zhuoyun, *Zijin cheng gongdian*, cover page. The highlighted area shows the palatial compound named “Palace of Living Out My Years in Peace,” which is located in the outer perimeter of northeastern quadrant of the Forbidden City.

⁶ This palatial complex was rebuilt on the site of a Ming palace in the thirty-eighth year of the Kangxi emperor (1699), and extended in the thirty-sixth year of the Qianlong emperor (1771). The Qianlong emperor had been planning to live in this palace in case he abdicated. In fact, he never lived in the palace even after his abdication.



and to which he wanted to retire after his abdication (see map 2). Commissioned by the emperor, construction of the pavilion began in the 36th year of his reign and finished in the 41st year (1771-76). It was renovated later in 1802 and again in 1891.⁷



Map 2. The close-up view of the palatial compound named “Palace of Living Out My Years in Peace”

⁷ Liao Ben 廖奔. 1997, p. 138. See also Lang Xiuhua 郎秀華. 2001, p. 91; also Zhu Jiajin 朱家潛. 1999, Vol. 2, p. 550; Yu Jian's 俞健. 2003, p. 445; Li Chang 李暢. 1998, p. 18; and Zhao Yang 趙楊. 2001, p. 22.



The Loge of Inspecting Truth (*Yueshi lou* 閣是樓), an audience hall of this gigantic theater, is situated in the south side (the opposite side) of the theater (Fig. 2). Equivalent to the “royal box,” this building was also constructed during the Qianlong period. It faces north and stands opposite the Pleasant Sound Pavilion. The Loge is two-stories high, five bays (*jian* 間) or 31 meters wide, and three bays or 17 meters deep.⁸ This area comprises the audience hall for the emperors, empresses, and court officials to watch opera performances. The Loge is franked with 13-bay corridors on both the eastern and western sides, and was the designated for ministers and high officials to watch the play. These corridors form viewing galleries which connect it to the rear area of the theatrical pavilion, which used to



Fig. 2 Front view of the Loge of Inspecting Truth. Photo taken at the Loge of Inspecting Truth by Sasiporn Petchapiruch on November 11, 2004.

⁸ One bay is equivalent to 6 meters.

function as a dressing room of the Pleasant Sound Pavilion, forming a courtyard-like architecture.⁹ This building was renovated during the seventh year of the Jiaqing 嘉慶 period (1802) and later was a favorite place for Empress Dowager Cixi 慈禧太后 to attend operas. She would sit on a couch surrounded on three sides by screens inside the main central doors. To watch the performance, she could open either the doors or the latticed shutters on each side. Glass panels meant that viewing was also possible through the closed doors.¹⁰ Behind the Loge of Inspecting Truth is located an imperial chamber named the “Study Room of Seeking a Path” (*Xunyan shuwu* 尋沿書屋) (Fig. 3). According to Mr. Zhao Yang, this chamber was



Fig. 3. Front view of the Study Room of Seeking a Path. Photo taken at the Study Room of Seeking a Path by Sasiporn Petcharapiruch on November 11, 2004.

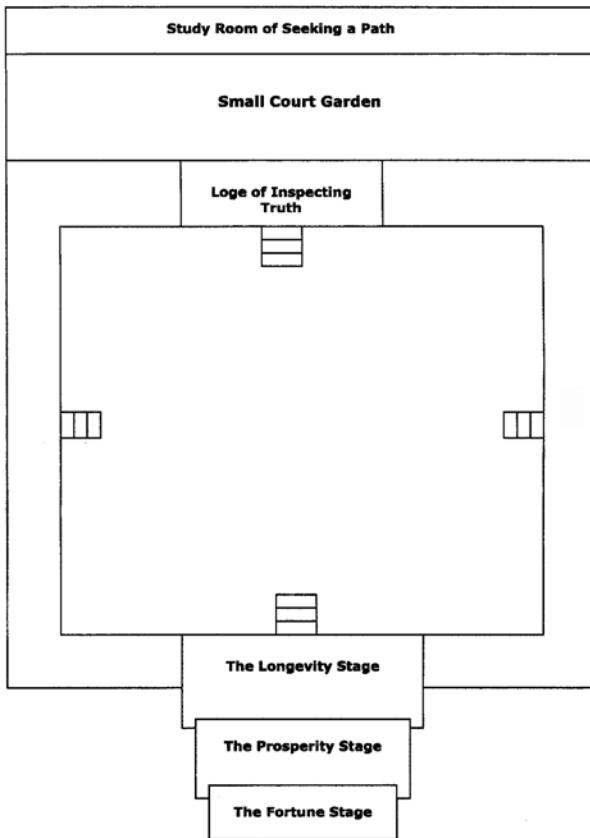
⁹ Liao Ben, *ibid.*, p. 138; Lang Xiuhua, *ibid.*, p. 91; Zhu Jiajin, *ibid.*, Vol. 2, p. 551; Li Chang, *ibid.*, p. 19; and Yu Jian, *ibid.*, Vol.2, p. 445.

¹⁰ Zhu Jiajin, *ibid.*, Vol. 2, p. 551.



also built under the Qianlong emperor's commission. It was used as a temporary bedroom for the emperor, if he grew tired from watching grand plays in the Pleasant Sound Pavilion (Diagram 1).¹¹

Diagram 1. Layout of the Pleasant Sound Pavilion, the Loge of Inspecting Truth, and Study Room of Seeking a Path



¹¹ Information from my discussion with Mr. Zhao Yang on November 11, 2004.



Fig. 4 a. Front view of the Immortal Tower. Photo taken inside the Longevity Stage of the Pleasant Sound Pavilion by Sasiporn Petcharapiruch on November 11, 2004.

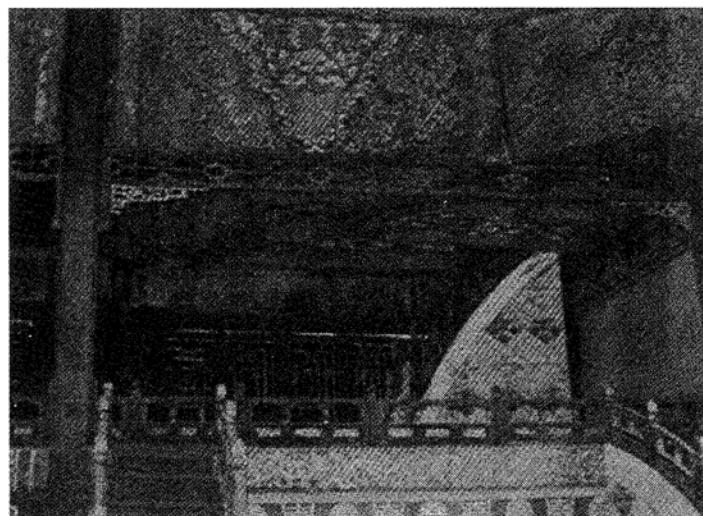


Fig. 4 b. The interior stage design of the Immortal Tower. Photo taken inside the Longevity Stage of the Pleasant Sound Pavilion by Sasiporn Petcharapiruch on November 11, 2004.



In terms of its measurement, the platform of the Pleasant Sound Pavilion stands 1.2 meters high. The height of the whole theater is 20.71 meters, with the entire surface covering 685.9 square meters. This grand theater consists of three floors. The first (ground) floor is called the “Longevity Stage” (*shou tai* 壽臺); the second (center) floor is called the “Prosperity Stage” (*lu tai* 祿臺); and the third (top) floor is called the “Fortune Stage” (*fu tai* 福臺). In fact, there is an additional platform hidden in stage, built into two layers at the back part of the Longevity Stage. It is called the “Immortal Tower” (*xian lou* 仙樓) or the “Clear Pavilion of the Longevity Stage” (*shoutai mingge* 壽臺明閣) (Figs. 4 a-4 b). This platform is a mezzanine floor-like balcony overhanging the interior space of the spacious hall, similar to a lobby in modern buildings. It is 3.5 meters in height, and 2.0 meters in width, and also functions as a performing stage. The front façade of the “Immortal Tower” consists of four large wooden staircases connected to the Longevity Stage. The slope of these wooden staircases is very steep. The side of the stairs is bowl-like shape, on which are depicted movable paintings of five-colored clouds. These staircases are called the *cha duo* 磋塲, *da duo* 搭塲, *ta duo* 踏塲, or *hong ni* 虹霓 (Figs. 5 a-5 b). Apparently, this three-tiered stage actually consists of four performing platforms.¹²

¹² Liao Ben. 1997, p. 142. See also Zhu Jiajin. 1999, Vol. 2, p. 550; Yu Jian. 2003, Vol. 2, p. 445.

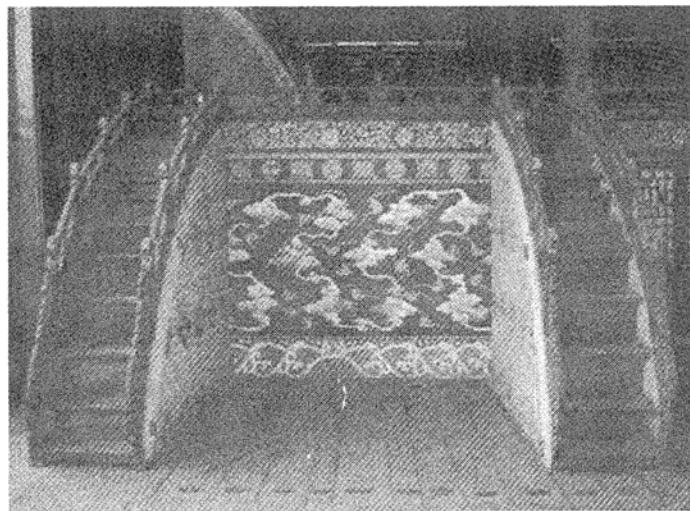


Fig. 5 a. Two *cha duo* 砧塈 and an entrance door (*shang chang men* 上場門) located on the left side of the Longevity Stage. Photo taken inside the Longevity Stage of the Pleasant Sound Pavilion by Sasiporn Petcharapiruch on November 11, 2004.



Fig. 5 b. Two *cha duo* and an exit door (*xia chang men* 下場門) located on the right side of the Longevity Stage. Photo taken inside the Longevity Stage of the Pleasant Sound Pavilion by Sasiporn Petcharapiruch on November 11, 2004.



With respect to the interior architecture of this three-tiered stage, the Longevity Stage covers the largest area (Fig. 6). It has twelve pillars, and the whole floor is three *bays* or 17 meters in width and three *bays* or 18.52 meters in depth,¹³ or the equivalent to nine platforms of ordinary theatrical stages.¹⁴ The Longevity Stage consists of two main areas: the front stage and the back stage. The former functions as a performing area, and has equipped on the floor one of the most interesting theatrical props called the “*dijing* 地井” or “pit.” Five *dijing* were installed on the floor: the largest one in the middle and four smaller ones in each corner (Fig. 7).

These *dijing* are normally covered and only opened when they are used. An entrance door (*shang chang men* 上場門) (Fig. 5 a.) and an exit door (*xia chang men* 下場門) (Fig. 5 b.) were also built on the front stage of the Longevity Stage. The former is on the left side of the stage, while the latter on the right side. They are located in between two *cha duo*. Both of them were made from wood, and decorated with a polychrome-style painting in a cloud motif. This cloud pattern symbolizes the heavenly nature of the Pleasant Sound Pavilion.

The rear part of the Longevity Stage is a two-storied building measuring five by three bays. The roof is attached to the eaves of the Fortune Stage, providing a spacious backstage area which also functions

¹³ Liao Ben, *ibid.*, p. 139; Lang Xiuhua, *ibid.*, p. 92; Zhu Jiajin, *ibid.*, Vol. 2, p. 551; Li Chang, *ibid.*, p. 19; and Yu Jian, *ibid.*, Vol.2, p. 445.

¹⁴ One platform is equivalent to 32 square meters.

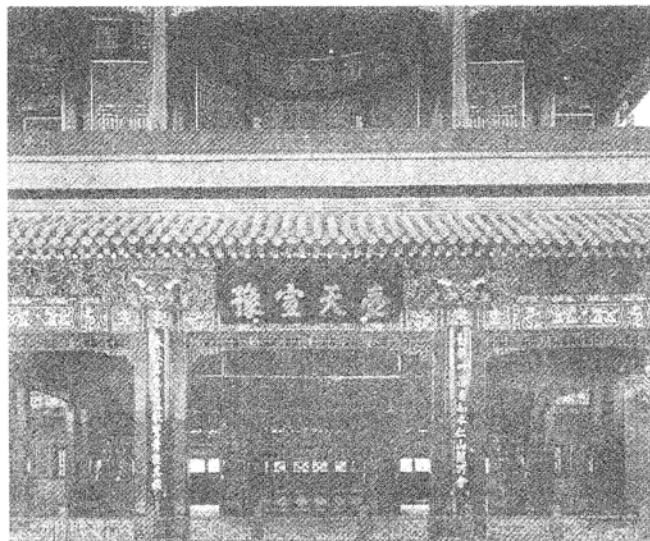


Fig. 6. Front view of the ground floor, called the Longevity Stage, of the Pleasant Sound Pavilion. Photo from Yu Zhuoyun, *Zijin cheng gongdian*, p. 165, plate 182.

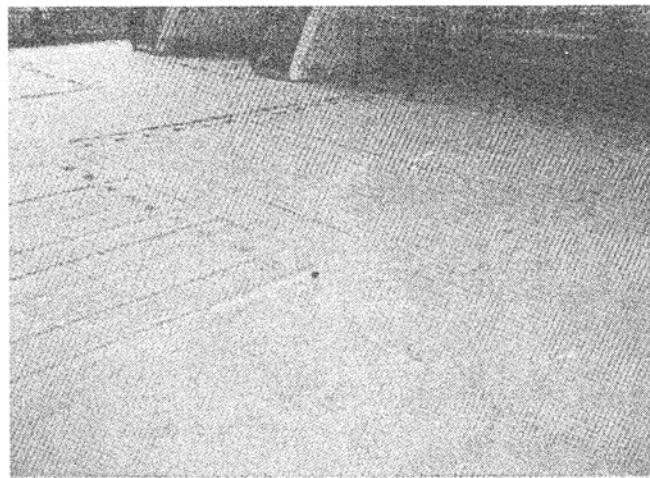


Fig. 7. Large *dijing* in the middle of the floor of the Longevity Stage. Photo taken inside the Longevity Stage of the Pleasant Sound Pavilion by Sasiporn Petchapiruch on November 11, 2004.

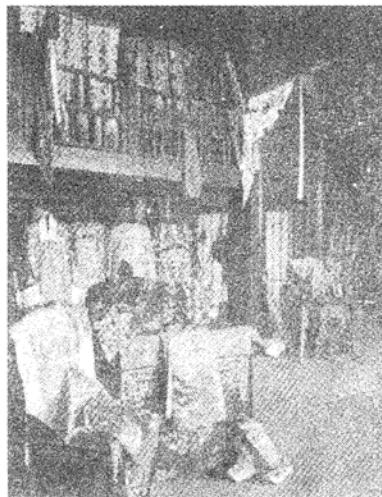


Fig. 8 a. The backstage of the Pleasant Sound Pavilion with displayed theatrical props and costumes. Photo from Zhao Yang, *Qingdai gongting yanxi*, p. 26.

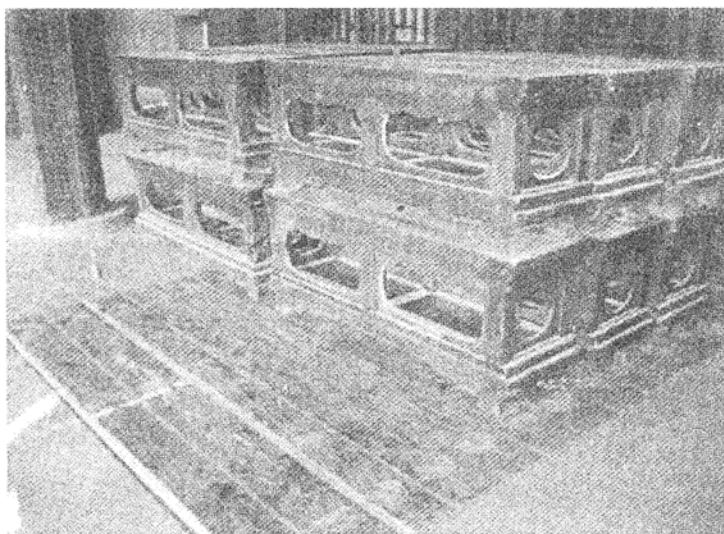


Fig. 8 b. Part of the backstage of the Pleasant Sound Pavilion. Photo taken inside the backstage of the Longevity Stage of the Pleasant Sound Pavilion by Sasiporn Petcharapiruch on November 11, 2004.



as a large dressing room. (*banxi lou* 扮戲樓) (Figs. 8 a.-8 b.). This area is divided into three different areas, named “Refine,” (*ya* 雅) “Womanly virtue,” (*shu* 雜) and “Miscellany” (*za* 雜). The “Refine” was an area for displaying play scripts and musical instruments; the “Womanly virtue” was for storing costumes, make-up, and also served as a waiting area for actors performing female characters (female impersonators); and the “Miscellany” was similarly for storing costumes and make-up, but served as a waiting area for actors performing male characters (male impersonators). In the dressing room there are also two large staircases on both sides, which are connected to the Prosperity Stage. According to Yu Jian, the backstage also functioned as an area where musicians played music during the opera performances during the Qianlong reign.¹⁵

The front area of the Longevity Stage, the Immortal Tower, and the backstage are separated by six movable, lattice-worked screen doors (*gezi men* 格子門) (Fig. 9). In the rear part of the Immortal Tower, there is a small area called the “peach stage” (*tao tai* 桃臺), which is as high as the Immortal Tower. The middle floor of the “peach stage” is equipped with quite a few “movable covered boards” (*huodong gaiban* 活動蓋板), which are connected to underground staircases (Diagram 2).¹⁶

¹⁵ Yu Jian, *ibid.*, p. 446.

¹⁶ Yu Jian, *ibid.*, p. 446.

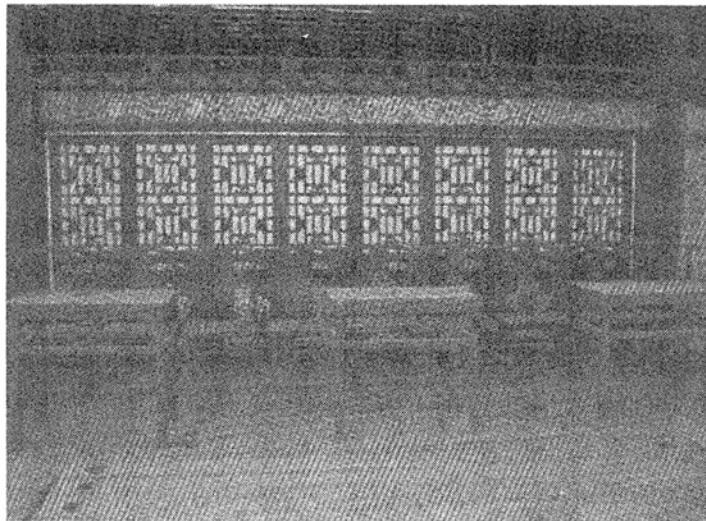


Fig. 9. Screen doors (*gezi men* 格子門) between the front stage and the backstage of the Longevity Stage, connected to the Immortal Tower. Photo taken inside the Longevity Stage of the Pleasant Sound Pavilion by Sasiporn Petchapiruch on November 11, 2004.

There are two interesting points of stage design on the Longevity Stage. Firstly, the top of the front two poles of this stage is equipped with a crossbeam. Judging from its position, this beam probably functions as a pole for hanging a stage curtain or screen (Fig. 10). Secondly, there is also a round-shaped iron ring, each on both left and right poles on the Longevity Stage. According to Mr. Zhao Yang, these rings were used for hanging lanterns during the drama performances.¹⁷

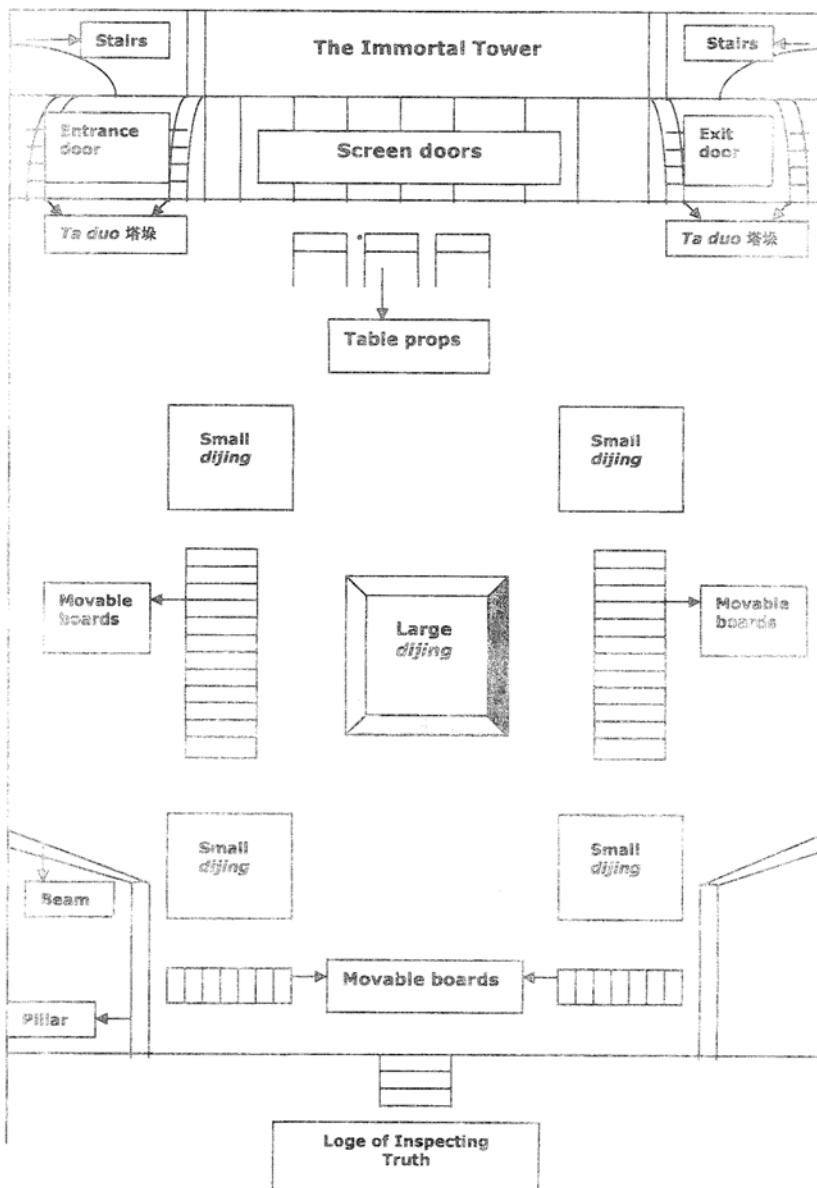
¹⁷ Information from my discussion with Mr. Zhao Yang on November 11, 2004.



Fig. 10. A beam supposedly used for hanging a stage curtain. Photo taken outside the Longevity Stage of the Pleasant Sound Pavilion by Sasiporn Petcharapiruch on November 11, 2004.

The open space or performing area of the Prosperity Stage covers only one-third of the entire floor, or a much smaller proportion than the Longevity Stage (Fig. 11). There are six screen doors forming a crescent shape in the middle of the performing area, with the main performing area on the front, left, and right side. Two screens on the left function as an entrance door, while two on the right serve as exit doors. In addition, sixteen screen doors were also built on the east and west sides, and twenty more on the south side of the stage.

Diagram 2. Layout of the Longevity Stage



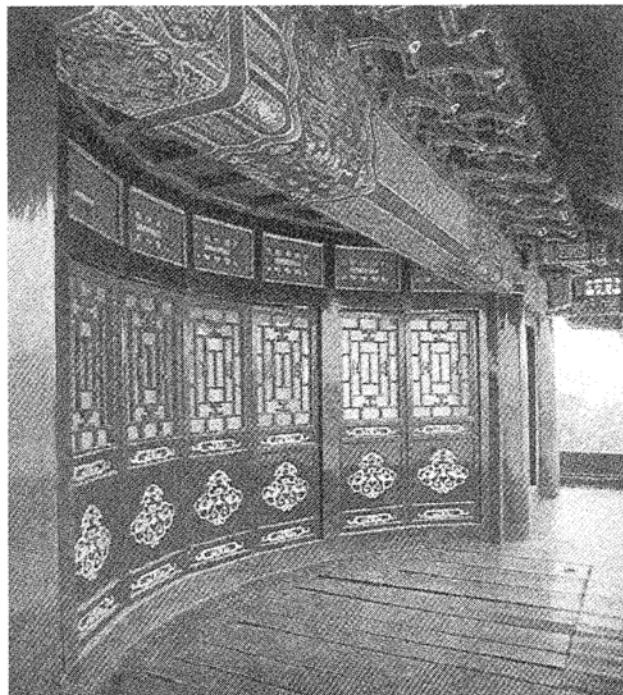


Fig. 11. The performing area of the second floor, called the Prosperity Stage, of the Pleasant Sound Pavilion. Photo from Yu Zhuoyun, *Zijin cheng gongdian*, p. 166, plate 185.

It is interesting to note that most of the performing areas are equipped with “movable covered boards.” By using any of these boards, actors could enter a “hidden layer” (*jia ceng* 夾層), through which they could descend to the Longevity Stage. Thus to ascend from the *cha duo* of the Immortal Tower to the Prosperity Stage, actors had to transit through the “hidden layer” in order to reach the Prosperity Stage. According to Yu Jian, this “hidden layer” was an extremely useful adaptation, for it allowed actors free movement between

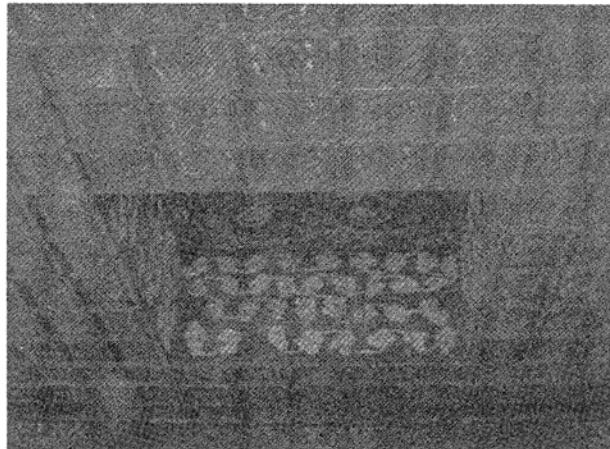


Fig. 12 a. A large *tianjing* 天井 on the middle of the ceiling of the Longevity Stage. Photo taken inside the Longevity Stage of the Pleasant Sound Pavilion by Sasiporn Patcharapiruch on November 11, 2004.

the Immortal Tower and the Prosperity Stage.¹⁸ The backstage of the Prosperity Stage is much larger than the front part. The floor of the backstage is equipped with five significant theatrical props called the “*tianjing* 天井” or “trap.” The largest one is built in the middle (Figs. 12 a-12 b), while four small ones are in each corner of the floor (Fig. 13). Among these five *tianjing*, the front two and the center ones are connected to the Longevity Stage (with the ceiling of this stage having three *tianjing*), whereas the rear two are connected to the Tower of the Immortals. There are also two large wooden staircases which are connected to the Longevity Stage and the Fortune Stage (Diagram 3).

¹⁸ Yu Jian, *ibid.*, p. 446.



Fig. 12 b. Close-up view of a large *tianjing* on the middle of the ceiling of the Longevity Stage. Photo taken inside the Longevity Stage of the Pleasant Sound Pavilion by Sasiporn Petcharapiruch on November 11, 2004.

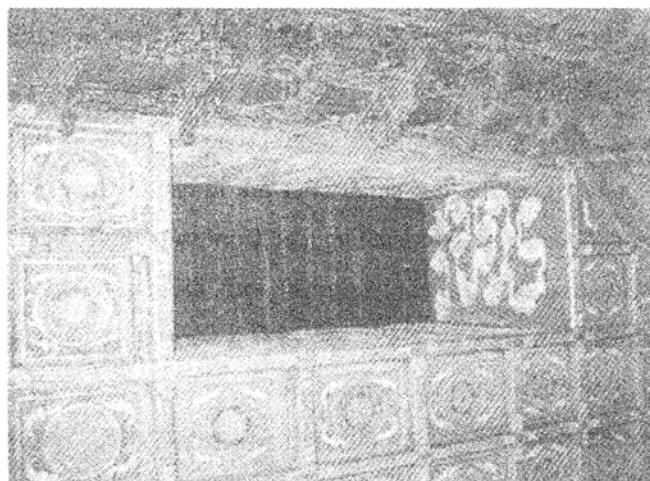
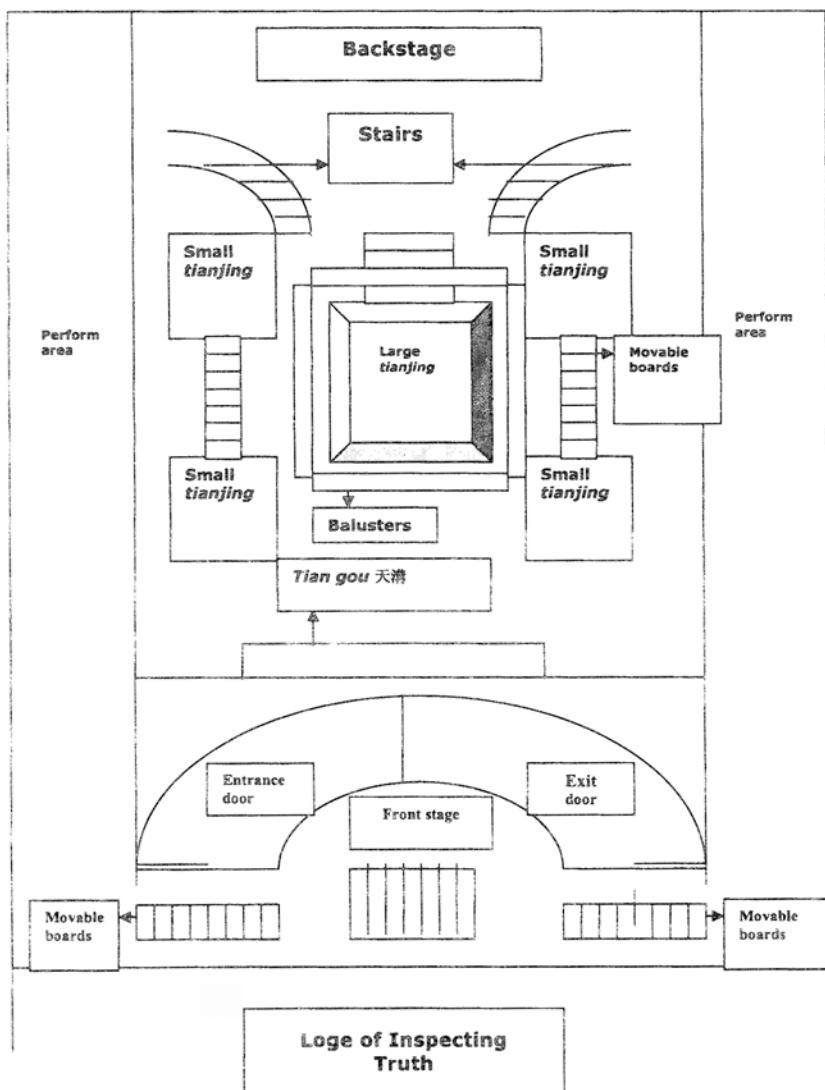


Fig. 13 Close-up view of one of the small *tianjing* on the ceiling of the Longevity Stage. Photo taken inside the Longevity Stage of the Pleasant Sound Pavilion by Sasiporn Petcharapiruch on November 11, 2004.

Diagram 3. Layout of the Prosperity Stage





Compared to the other main platforms, the open space of the Fortune Stage is the smallest. It covers merely one-fourth of the entire floor, due to the limitation imposed by the audience watching from the Loge of Inspecting Truth. Like the Prosperity Stage, the front and backstage of the Fortune Stage are also equipped with screen doors that could be opened out onto the performance. Since the scale of the Fortune Stage is smaller than the Prosperity Stage, therefore the screen doors built on the former are fewer in number. There are only four screen doors which form a similar crescent shape in the middle of the performing area. The screens on the left and right function as an entrance door and an exit door, respectively. On the east and west sides of the stage were built twelve screen doors; and on the south side sixteen more. Furthermore, the performing area of the Fortune Stage is also equipped with “movable covered boards.” When these boards were uncovered, actors could descend to “bridges” or “tunnels” (*tianqiao* 天橋), which were built in all three sides (northern, eastern and western) of the stage. This “bridge” is connected to the backstage, and its purpose is like that of the “hidden layer” on the Prosperity Stage, providing a pathway for actors.¹⁹ Likewise, the backstage of the Fortune Stage is much larger than the front area. It consists of one large *tianjing* in the middle of the floor, two large staircases, and five handspike windlasses (*lu lu* 轆轤). The two large windlasses are on the left and right sides of the *tianjing*, while the three small ones are

¹⁹ Yu Jian, *ibid.*, p. 446.

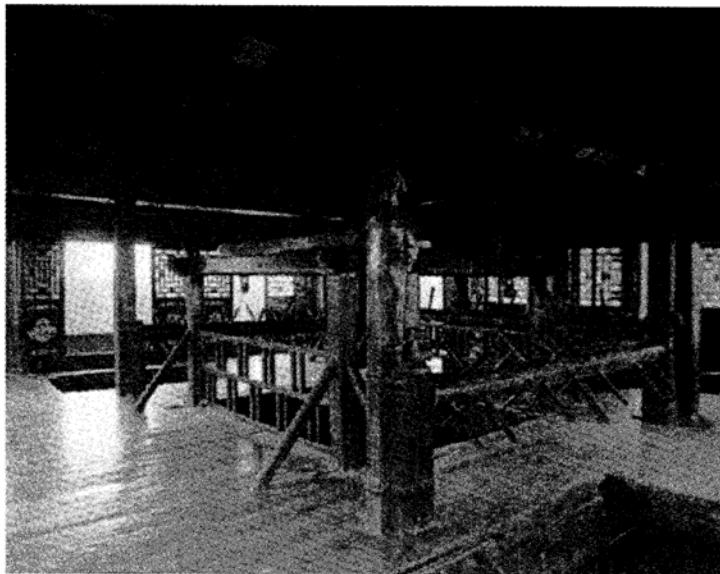
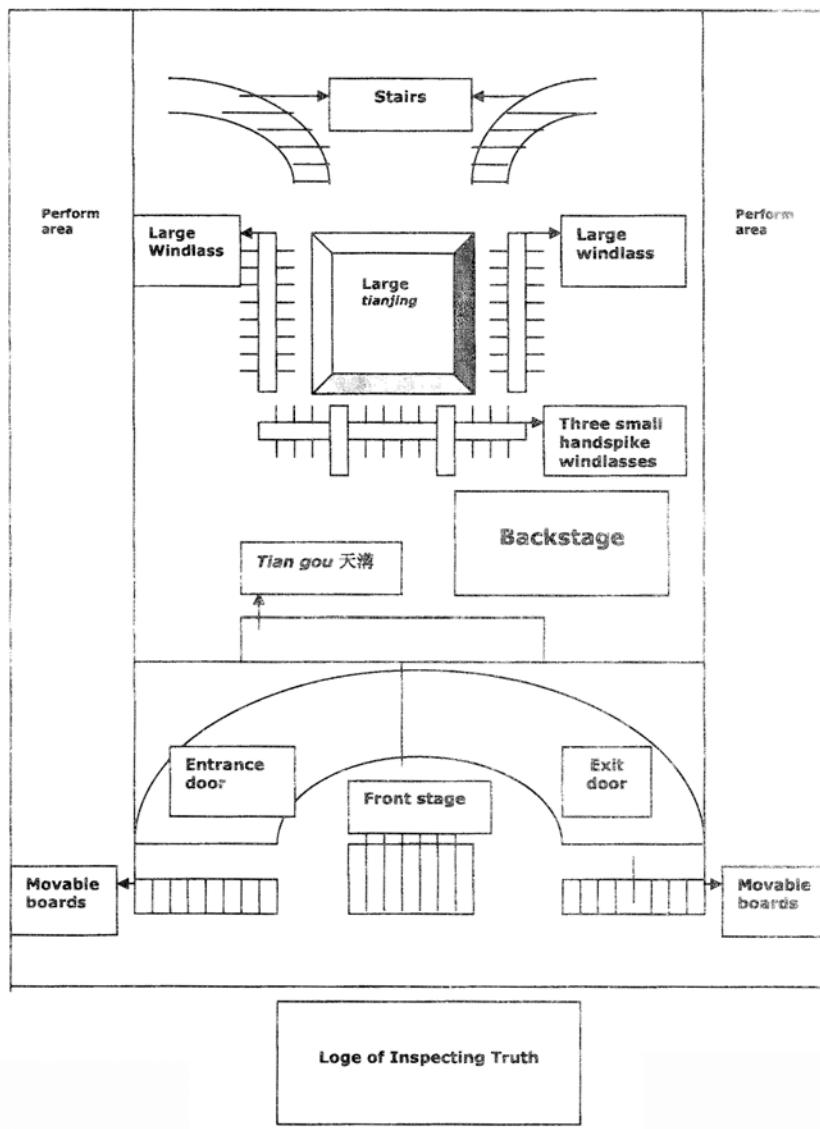


Fig. 14. Five handspike windlasses for the lifting apparatus located in the backstage of the Fortune Stage of the Pleasant Sound Pavilion. Photo from Yu Zhuoyun, *Zijin cheng gongdian*, p. 166, plate 184.

located behind the front stage (Fig. 14). This machine primarily consists of series of winches (*jiao che* 紹車), railings (*lan gan* 欄杆), wheels (*hua lun* 滑輪) and ropes. Six of 1.6-meter-high poles were built to support these windlasses. Furthermore, five support beams were installed on top of these poles, forming an enclosure. Wheels or pulleys were fastened to the ropes which were tied to the support beams. Every 35 centimeters of these windlasses are installed with a handspike. The big windlass has eighteen handles, with nine on each side. To use the windlass, eighteen people are required to revolve it, and according to Yu Jian, this lifting apparatus could hold more than 500 kilograms or seven to eight actors. As Yu Jian has pointed out, the backstage of the



Diagram 4. Layout of the Fortune Stage



Fortune Stage was mainly used as a “preparation floor” (*shebei ceng* 設備層 or *caozuo ceng* 操作層).²⁰ Therefore, in order to enable the audiences to enjoy the performances, the actors could only perform within the small open spaces near the balustrades of the Prosperity Stage and the Fortune Stage (Diagram 4).²¹

In addition to these four platforms, the Pleasant Sound Pavilion also contains a functioning underground area. I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to go down to the underground, courtesy of Mr. Zhao Yang and his staff, though was not allowed to take any pictures. In order to descend to this area, the “moveable covered boards” on the Longevity Stage have to be opened (Figs. 15 a-15 b). There are eight-stepped wooden staircases leading to the underground area, which is extremely dark and damp underneath. The entire floor has been covered with dust for hundred years, despite the built-in ventilations on two sides of the walls. The underground area is as large as the front stage and the backstage of the Longevity Stage, though only one meter in height. In the middle there is a water well whose top part is equipped with two small pulleys. Two rows of handspike windlasses were built on the left and right sides of the well. In some areas of the underground area, there are also “movable covered boards” under which small wells were installed. Moreover, many small stairs (*mu ti* 木梯) were piled up in the front right corner. According to Mr. Zhao Yang, these stairs were used for lifting up

²⁰ Yu Jian, *ibid.*, p. 447..

²¹ Liao Ben, *ibid.*, pp. 147-148, Yu Jian, *ibid.*, pp. 443-444, and Li Chang, *ibid.*, p. 19.



Fig. 15 a. The pathway to the underground covered with the “movable covered boards” on the Longevity Stage. Photo taken inside the Longevity Stage of the Pleasant Sound Pavilion by Sasiporn Petchapiruch on November 11, 2004.

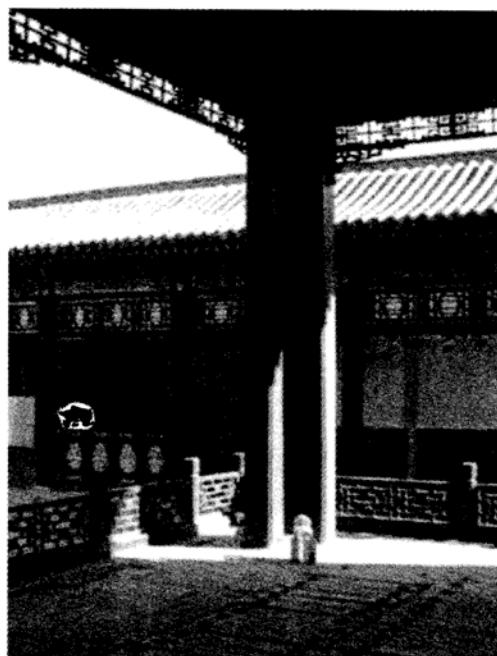
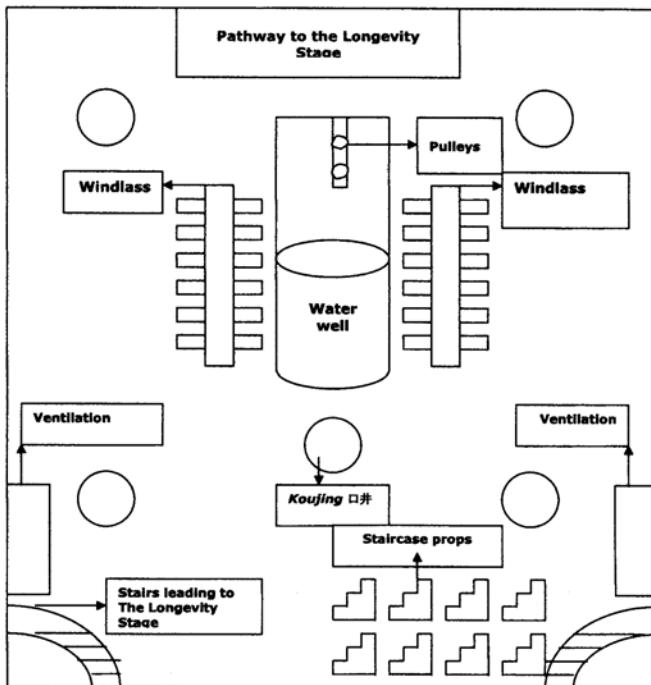


Fig. 15 b. The pathway to the underground covered with the “movable covered boards” on the Longevity Stage. Photo taken inside the Longevity Stage of the Pleasant Sound Pavilion by Sasiporn Petchapiruch on November 11, 2004.



actors from the underground to the Longevity Stage during the performances.²² In the rear part of the underground was also built a “pathway” (*tongdao* 通道), which is connected to the backstage of the Longevity Stage (Diagram 5).

Diagram 5. Layout of the Underground



²² Information derived from my discussion with Mr. Zhao Yang on November 11, 2004.

Thus it is evident that the symbol used, the spatial effects created and the architectural theme as well as the structural composition of the Pleasant Sound Pavilion was intentionally designed, especially since the building was built as an emperor's recreational hall. Insofar as the Qianlong emperor was seen as the Son of the Heaven and possessing divine power, his place of entertainment must be of the grandest scale and finished with the most ornate of decorations. The subtle balance and interdependence between the constituent parts of a composition are the defining characteristics of traditional Chinese architecture, clearly exemplified by the Pleasant Sound Pavilion three-tiered stage.



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