

Wilt IDEMA/Stephen H. WEST: *Chinese Theater 1100–1450 – A Source Book*. Wiesbaden, Franz Steiner Verlag, 1982 (Münchener Ostasiatische Studien, Band 27), 523 pp.

The purpose of this volume is to present a source-book for the social and institutional aspects of Chinese theater and drama during its first heyday. After a short introduction into the early history of Chinese theater and into the prerequisites of its rapid rise during the reign of the Sung and Yüan dynasties the authors straightly go medias in res.

In the first chapter the theater and acting in the Sung and Chin is presented by translations from five descriptions of the two capitals of the Sung, Kaifeng and Hangchou. The main source of course is the *Tung-ching meng hua lu* by Meng Yüan-lao. We are informed about the remarkable variety of entertaining arts from boxing, football, knife throwing, riddles and many other kinds to story-telling, puppet-shows, and the proper forms of theater; then the most popular performers of all these arts are mentioned; and we hear about the occasions and festivals when performances were arranged.

In chapter 2 the professional and institutional organizations of the entertainers as for instance the noted Court Entertainment Bureau (Chiao-fang ssu), and the relation between the actors and writers are dealt with.

Chapter 3 gives an account of the social position of the actors. Since the sources are written by members of the ruling class of literati and officials, they clearly reflect the prejudices and idealizations – maybe two faces of the same coin – of this group towards the acting profession, especially towards actresses. The main source for this chapter is Hsia T'ing-chih: *Ch'ing-lou chi* (“The Green Bower Collection”) with its numerous accounts of sing-song girls. (For one of the most famous of these actresses cf. a short article which appeared only recently: Li Hsiu-sheng: „Yüan-tai tsa-chü yen-yüan Chu Lien-hsiu“, *Hsi-ch'ü yen-chiu*, no. 5. April 1982, pp.239–243.)

Chapter 4 gives an insight into major types of performances at the courts of the imperial family, in public theaters or on private occasions. In chapters 5 to 7 the authors present translations of three plays of the Sung and Yüan dynasties: “A Playboy from a Noble House Opts for the Wrong Career” (*Huan-men tzu-ti ts'o-li-shen*), one of the three Southern plays preserved in the *Yung-lo ta-tien*; “Wind and Moon in the Courtyard of Purple Clouds” (*Feng-yüeh tzu-yün-t'ing*); and “Chung-li of the Han Leads Lan Ts'ai-ho to Enlightenment” (*Han Chung-li tu-t'o Lan Ts'ai-ho*). The common feature of these three dramas is that they are related to the history of Chinese theater not only by their intrinsic literary value, but also by the fact that their action is taking place in the milieu of actors and actresses. Thus they are valuable sources for the knowledge of the social and professional conditions of the actors, too.

The book is concluded by a long chapter about the early Ming dramatist Chu Yu-tun who also wrote several plays on sing-song girls and actresses. The chapter comprises a partial translation of “A Good Marriage: Breeze and Moonlight for Peach Spring Sight” (*Mei yin-yüan feng-yüeh t'ao-hua ching*) and a complete translation of “Liu Chin-erh from Hsüan-p'ing Ward Becomes a Sing-Song Girl again” (*Hsüan-p'ing hang Liu Chin-erh fu lo-ch'ang*) and “Liu Awaiting Spring Remains Loyal: Perfume Sachet Grief (*Liu Chin-ch'un shou-chih hsiang-nang yüan*) and finally some poems by Chu concerning the theatrical world.

The volume covers a very wide scope of the theater – excluded are only aspects of music, acting techniques and religious beliefs of the entertainers. It is based on a most remarkable variety of sources: official documents (codes, histories), private writings and

compilations of different kinds, cartographic materials, local gazetteers, various literary texts as novels – above all parts of the *Shui-hu chuan* –, ballads, poems and dramas etc. In introducing, interpreting and translating the sources the authors display a wide knowledge, a firm grip of their materials and a sound sense of solidity.

Thus there are only minor matters to be noted critically, mainly misprints and inconsistencies:

p.3: the title of Ch'en Yü-chiao's collection of comedies should be written

古名家雜劇;

p.16: the name of the famous actor Ting Hsien-hsien is written 丁仙現;

p.17: the correct name of „Chao T'ing-sou“ is Chang T'ing-sou;

p.86: the name of the author of the *Hsi-hsiang chi*, Tung Chieh-yüan, is translated Master Tung, on p.128 he is called Laureate Tung;

p.187: lu-t'ai, „exposed stage“, is written 露臺;

p.344: the birth-date of Chu Yu-tun is inexplicably given as 1398; he was born, as is correctly stated in other parts of the book, in 1379.

At the end of chapter 1, when the authors talk about regional theater centers, the town of Yang-chou is missing, an important political and cultural center in the 13th century already.

The translations in some cases are open to debate. Nobody knows that better than the authors themselves, since they are very well aware of the fact that a source like the *Tung-ching meng hua lu* confronts any reader and translator with extreme difficulties regarding the punctuation. To give an example: In *Tung-ching meng hua lu*, ch.5, paragraph „Ching-wa chi-i“ (‘Talents and Skills of the Capital Pleasure Districts’) we find the sentence

教坊減罷并溫習張翠蓋張成  
弟子薛子大薛子小俏枝兒揚總惜周壽奴稱心

IDEMA/WEST (p.18) translate it in the following way:

„Those who were retired from the Court Entertainment Bureau and those who are well practiced in the same: Chang Ts'ui-kai, Chang Ch'eng ti-tzu (‘Chang the Perfected Courtesan’), Hsüeh-tzu-ta (‘Big Hsüeh’), Hsüeh-tzu-hsiao (‘Little Hsüeh’), Ch'iao chi-erh (‘Winsome Snippet’), Yang Tsung-hsi, Chou Shou-nu, Ch'eng-hsin (‘Suite the Heart’).“

But the names could as well, and in the opinion of the reviewer should be read: „Chang Ts'ui-kai, Chang Ch'eng, the courtesans Hsüeh-tzu-ta, Hsüeh-tzu-hsiao, Ch'iao-chi-erh, Yang Tsung-hsi, Chou Shou, and Nu Ch'eng-hsin.“ This translation follows the punctuation in Teng Chih-ch'eng's annotated edition of the *Meng hua lu* (Hongkong 1961, 2nd ed. 1975), p.137. It is strongly supported by another passage in the same book (ch.7, „Chia-teng Bao-chin-lou, chu chün ch'eng pai-hsi“ ed. Teng Chih-ch'eng, pp.201ff.), where some of these names are mentioned again.

The main deficiency of the volume under review, however, is the fact that it does not have an index. For such a source-book with its numerous names, phrases, technical terms, titles etc, an index must be regarded to be indispensable. Without it the value of the book as a work of reference is somewhat reduced. One suspects that the blame has to be put more on the calculations of the publishing house than on the authors themselves.

On the whole, however, these matters remain minor ones. They cannot affect the conviction of the reviewer that this book will serve as a most useful and valuable companion for everyone interested in the social and institutional history of Chinese theater and drama.

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