The Authentic Self in 17th Century Chinese Drama *

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The 17th Century was a major cycle in Chinese culture, an era of complex cross-currents in which a romantic vision of an authentic self captured the literati imagination. During the Wan-li reign (1575-1620) of the late Ming, many saw an opportunity to revitalize a culture stagnating in traditionalism. With a burst of heroic optimism, they directly challenged the orthodox modes of expression with a new, individualistic sensibility. A variety of alternate styles and vehicles came to the forefront but it was drama which best mythologized these ideals in terms of the ongoing "literati romance." The great comedies of the age presented the struggle to realize one's genuine identity in a perfected society; and dramatists emerged as focal personalities whose lives and thought, as well as their works articulated this theme.

In the mid-century, the force of historical events intervened. The unexpected decline and fall of the Ming dynasty cast doubt on the validity of many Wan-li ideals. What had been confidently inaugurated as a truer mode of being became increasingly viewed with nostalgia, irony and tragic realism. By the close of the century in the K'ang-hsi reign (1662-1723) of the early Ch'ing, another wave of traditionalism reflected the reintegration of culture under an autocracy which once again promoted orthodox values. Drama responded this with a new sense of historicism and attempted to reconcile its earlier allegiances with the shift in taste.

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The Growth of the Authentic Self

The possibility of a new sense of identity had, in fact, been suggested somewhat earlier. In the late 15th and early 16th centuries, Wang Yang-ming (王陽明) presented a major revision of orthodox Neo-Confucianism in the course of which he questioned the classical concept of self which had been cannonized in *The Great Learning* (大學, *Ta-hsüeh*). As edited by the Sung philosopher Chu Hsi (朱熹), that simplest and most influential of classics defined the grounds of identity as centered in the "person" (身 , *shen*). Through a process termed "personal cultivation" (修身 , *hsiu-shen*), primarily interior concerns ("classifying phenomena" [格物 , *ko-wu*], "developing intelligence" [致知, *chih-chih*], "integrating the will" [誠意 , *ch'eng-i*], and "rectifying the mind" [正心 , *cheng-hsin*]) were practiced in increment with external, social activities ("ordering the family" [齊家 , *ch'i-chia*], "ruling the nation" [治國 , *chih-kuo*], and "pacifying the world" [平天下 , *p'ing t'ien-hsia*]). The virtuous results of this were to be evident in the dispassionate sincerity of the "person" which ideally progressed to a state of perfect integration of inner and outer aspects termed "sagehood" (聖 , *sheng*).

Wang's critique of this rhetorical view arose out of his own early struggle with "classifying phenomena." In a vain attempt to conceive of the world in terms of the rational principles (理, *li*) of orthodoxy, he experienced a sudden enlightenment into the nature of inner being and later wrote:

> What is the person? It is the corporeal form of the mind in action. What is the mind? It is the spiritual master of the person. What is personal cultivation? It means to do good and eliminate the bad. Can my person do this alone? It must be the spiritual master which wants to do so and then the action of the corporeal form can do likewise. Therefore, he who would cultivate his person must first rectify the mind.[2]

Wang advocated a profound relocation of the grounds of identity inwards, asserting the primacy of the mind as a transcendental entity, instictively good and organically whole. Instead of an incremental progress, personal cultivation was to be an inner search to discover one's quality of perfect awareness (良知 , *liang-chih*) which would then be expressed in the external world. Sudden enlightenment (悟 , *wu*) had an important

function in this for it enabled the self to dramatically disengage from habitual patterns and soar into a new universe of being. Wang believed that the ultimate goal of sageliness was not really verifiable by an objective standard but was more of a recognition of one's own degree of actualized virtue. Consequently, the "person" was viewed more suspiciously, as an external aspect often determined by society. The new authority given the mind enabled the individual to determine his public self to a greater degree.

What gave Wang's vision tremendous influence over successive generations of followers cannot be ascribed merely to his charisma or to the force of his ideas as pure philosophy. His thought, which was classified within the School of the Mind (心學, *hsin-hsüeh*), gained widespread credence because it offered a solution to the problem of personal cultivation as institutionalized by the Ming system.

During the Ming, literati had rebounded from their displacement under Mongol rule to attain greater status than ever before—as cultural arbiters, as a gentry and as bureaucrats. Their size grew rapidly as evidenced by the figures for the number of holders of the lowest degree of licentiate: from the beginning of the dynasty in 1368 to the year 1600, this core group expanded more than twenty times to about 600,000 while the population had only doubled.[3] While optimism spread over the unprecedented possibilities of social mobility, the actual ladder of success was rigidly controlled by the examination system which required literati to tread the arduous "orthodox path" (正途, *cheng-t'u*). "Classifying phenomena" meant the memorization of the classical corpus and perfection of the essay style then in fashion. Repeated examinations determined the virtue of the "person," resulting in degree status. Equally important, the texts of Neo-Confucianism were interpreted to serve as an ideological code whereby the bureaucrat was exalted as the only legitimate role of the sage.[4] Gradually, a tension arose between institutional reality and classical ideal due to the growing inability of the dynasty to provide literati with the only kind of employment it had convinced them was proper. The lower levels of degree holders continued to inflate while the elite levels—those of provincial and metropolitan graduates necessary to hold office—remained fixed. Inevitably, this caused a widespread denial of expectations which only exacerbated as the Ming began its decline in the early 17th century.

It is not surprising, then, that Wang's vision appealed, on a popular level, to those who sought access to a valid sense of sagehood even if they

could not become officials. Not only did they respond to the immediacy of his process but to his view that the mere attainment of office did not constitute a perfected character. Freed from the authority of the orthodox path (though not necessarily from its formal requirements), many followers went on to explore new avenues: Wang Ken (王艮),[5] a small-scale salt-merchant with only a few years of formal education, became a devoted follower of Wang Yang-ming and set about preaching what has been called a "celebration of self." A founder of the T'ai-chou school (泰州學派), he engaged in social activism amongst the masses, focusing on physical and material well-being and the impassioned search for sageliness through joy in everyday things. Another follower, Ho Hsin-yin (何心隱),[6] attempted to create alternate societies in his family commune and residential club, these based on a sense of naturalness in restructuring human relationships. Lin Chao-en (林兆恩)[7] syncretized the ethical ideals of Neo-Confucianism with Buddhist and Taoist spiritual techniques, propagating this through his network of Churches of the Three Teachings.

On the elite levels of literati, amongst those who earnestly competed for higher degrees or actually succeeded in holding office, this movement was also reflected, though more covertly, in the unprecedented political activism. The failure of later Ming emperors to act as their own executives encouraged a succession of autocratic grand secretaries to arise. Especially from Wan-li onward, these figures arose to dominate the Emperor in the inner court and repress dissent amongst their fellow literati in the outer court.[8] In response, young officials and candidates organized into parties to facilitate their success and gain the emperor's support for necessary dynastic reforms. The most famous of these, the Tung-lin (東林) and its offspring, the Fu-she (復社),[9] grew out of private academies, many of whose teachers were followers of Wang Yang-ming. They evolved their own style of examination essay and advocated the "genuine" texts of the classics as the source of their reforms. On the surface, their rhetoric was ultra-orthodox and they disdained the populist tendencies of some of Wang's other followers. But to the extent that they emphasized inner struggle and enlightenment as the path to sagehood, and believed that the judgement of their fellow members, rather than the state, represented the true determination of their virtue, their born-again revivalism may be seen as an "authentic orthodoxy."[10]

One of the most definitive spokesmen to arise at the beginning of the

17th century was Li Chih (李贄).[11] A complete original, even in an age that boasted of great personalities, he transcended popular and elite experiences and was one of the first to extend Wang's ideas into the realms of aesthetics and criticism.

Li hailed from an undistinguished background of moslem merchants in the coastal province of Fukien but was able to acquire an education and rose quickly to provincial graduate at the age of 25. He continued to diligently tread the orthodox path until he was 54, holding a series of fairly high offices until he underwent a sudden enlightenment. Thereupon, he resigned his office, left his family, adopted a Buddhist persona and spent the remainder of his life, traveling, teaching and developing his iconoclastic views.

One of his most influential values was the "child-like mind" (童心, *t'ung-hsin*), the expression of which endowed art and life with true vitality:

> This child-like mind is absolutely pure and genuine—the mind of our most immediate thoughts. To lose it is to lose the authentic mind, to lose our authentic selves; and he who is not authentic cannot recover his original innocence. Now the child is the beginning of the man and the child-like mind, the most primal mind. How could we bear to lose it and yet, inexplicably, we allow it to be abandoned. In the beginning, things seen and heard are received by the senses and dominate our inner selves. Thus the child-like mind is lost. And as we get older, there are rational principles which are received along with what is seen and heard, likewise dominating us and the child-like mind is lost . . . .[12]

The origin of this lies in Mencius' "mind of a new-born babe" (赤人之心, *ch'ih-jen chih hsin*)[13] which Mencius believed was an inborn moral quality capable of being nurtured by Confucian cultivation. Li Chih's view was less charitable. The "child-like mind" was always in danger of being crushed by orthodoxy and could only be sustained by an antithetical struggle against inauthentic traditions. He thus extended Wang Yang-ming's process into a far more dialectical sphere of action, one which involved a militant opposition to the state of the present world in the hope of a sudden breakthrough beyond conventions.

By equating the "child-like mind" with the "authentic mind" (眞心, *chen-hsin*), Li syncretized a term which described the state of the "realized man" (眞人, *chen-jen*), or Taoist sage. Mythical qualities of total spontaneity and unlimited freedom fueled an expansion of the self beyond

Neo-Confucianism's ethical borders. Li's concept of authenticity suggested new possibilities in the literati quest for the ideal mode of being, promising a greater realm of external action through deeper committment to the truth of one's inner motives.[14]

Amongst those in literature who were most influenced by this was a group of avant-garde writers in the Kung-an school (公安派). In a preface to a work by Yüan Hung-tao (袁宏道),[15] one of the leaders, a fellow member wrote:

> Authenticity is the perfection of a crystallized integrity for nothing else can so move others . . . only when there is an authentic man can there be authentic words. The authentic man has a lofty insight and an abundance of emotion so that he can say that which others wish to, that which others cannot, that which others dare not . . . .[16]

and Yüan himself stated:

> That which our natures take delight in cannot be forced. He who acts according to his own nature is called an "authentic man. . . ."[17]

Yüan believed that the basic flaw in the art of his time lay in the predominant taste for adopting stylistic masks from the past. The first two centuries of the Ming had been a period of traditionalistic revival in which earlier eras such as the Han, T'ang and Sung were mythified as heydays of literati achievement. In poetry and prose, various schools arose to dominate the scene with their particular preference for the mannerisms of certain masters. As more people gained access to the techniques of expression, it was increasingly acceptable to merely demonstrate a sincere mastery of formal elements rather than communicate an original insight or powerful emotion. The Kung-an writers, on the other hand, encouraged a new subjectivity, an attitude of experimentation and the confidence to dispense with the artifice of the past in order to bring forth the genuine style of one's sensibility (性靈 , *hsing-ling*) and natural personality (本色 , *pen-se*).

Yüan argued:

> Poetry and prose has indeed degenerated in our time for prose must conform to the styles of the Chin and Han and poetry, to that of the High T'ang. Plagarism! Imitation! Emulation! Mimicry! Anyone who has written even

> one word which is not allusive is regarded as an 'animal' or as 'heterodox.' I could never see why prose should conform to the Ch'in or Han. Since when did the Ch'in and Han imitate the *Six Classics* word for word? Nor why poetry should conform to the High T'ang? Since when did the High T'ang poets imitate the Han and Wei. . .? In each era, things come to the forefront and decline yet our styles do not reflect this. Each era should achieve the ultimate in transformation (變 , *pien*) and flavor (趣 ,*ch'ü*). That is what is valuable. It is not a question of measuring which period is better or worse.[18]

To achieve "transformation" best sums up the Kung-an program for an authentic literature. In the broadest sense, it denoted literature's proper place in the universal *Tao* as a process of change. Historically, it meant evolving new genres and individual styles within genres. When applied to a specific work, it could indicate a sensational impact upon the reader using techniques of surprise or shock. And it was also the artist's own metamorphosis of self as he made contact with and expressed his divine inspiration.

Li Chih and the Kung-an writers enthusiastically promoted drama as amongst the most characteristic forms of the age. The total effect of its mode of presentation, its exposition of literati ideals and its relative neglect by the elite increased its appeal as a vehicle of the vanguard. Before reflecting on drama in the 17th century, it is worth turning briefly to the role it came to occupy in Chinese culture and its generic values.

Drama and the Literati Romance

It has been generally noted that in comparison to Ancient Greece and Rome, drama did not play an important role in the early phases of Chinese culture. The absence of an economic basis for a theatre, of a homogeneous audience and of a universal ritual may largely account for the lack of an equivalent of Aristophanes, Aeschylus or Plautus. But by the 13th century, at least, these factors seem to have appeared when simple farces, poetic arias and dances, and narrative ballads were synthesized into *tsa-chū* (雜劇) or the northern style.[19]

This belated occurence was undoubtedly related to the increased importance since the Sung of large urban centers of commercial activity which created consumers of professional theatre.[20] More relevant to our

concern with literary drama, however, is the emerging self-consciousness of a class of people whose status depended on their command of literature—the literati we have been speaking of; and of its growing need for a collective experience which would affirm its most central values. The orthodox path was one such definitive experience, advancing literati interests politically and institutionally. But Neo-Confucianism lacked a close reference to contemporary life and its public ceremonies were devoid of the emotional power capable of producing a catharsis. Instead, comedy developed alongside to fulfill this need for a secularized ritual. In what might be termed the "literati romance," a system of idealized characters, worlds and themes evolved which mirrored onstage the hopes of an audience for legitimization of the cultivated person.

Wang Shih-fu's (王實甫) *The Western Chamber* (西廂記, *Hsi-hsiang-chi*)[21] was the first great work to articulate this and has remained the prototypical romantic comedy. In a process consisting of three phases—union (合, *ho*), separation (離, *li*) and reunion (團圓, *t'uan-yüan*) —the hero and heroine enact the struggle for love and worldly success overcoming opposition from conventional anti-comic forces.

The lovers are introduced in the initial phase of union and progress from the inhibitions of society to the consummation of their passion in a world apart. Chang Chün-jui as the hero and Ts'ui Ying-ying as the heroine are both characterized according to the ideal formula of the "genius and beauty" (才子佳人, *ts'ai-tzu chia-jen*); for Chang posesses the innate talent, artistic sensibility and youthful innocence to match Ying-ying's unusual degree of intelligence, accomplishment and allure. Both share a lofty social status endowing them with the higher power of action characteristic of romantic figures. Chang is the son of a late government minister while Ying-ying's status is even higher, as a daughter of the late prime minister and member of the aristocratic Ts'ui clan. Yet the fact that their fathers are dead places them in a precarious position. They stand at the brink of downward mobility and must fill the vacuum created by the waning of family power with the force of their individual selves.

Chang first meets Ying-ying in the neutral world of a Buddhist monastery which stands mid-way between the "real" world outside and their own pyschological beings. A funeral ceremony for Ying-ying's father is held, appropriately symbolizing the suspension of normal life. The lovers are present along with anti-comic forces: Buddhist asceticism, social ritual,

the heroine's rectitude and parental objections. Wang Shih-fu forefronts Mme. Ts'ui as the most persistant of obstacles facing the lovers. She is unimpressed by Chang's lack of a degree and later cunningly reneges on a promise of betrothal, attempting to deceive Ying-ying into marrying the degenerate son of a relative. Her materialistic and utilitarian motives stand in support of the waning aristocracy and are in sharpest contrast with the ideal of meritocracy represented by Chang.

A secondary anti-comic force is that of external aggression. After the ceremony, the bandit Sun the Flying Tiger surrounds the monastery and demands Ying-ying as a bride. Lust is counterpoised against true love and provides an opportunity for the genius to demonstrate another literati ideal—military as well as civil abilities—as Chang outflanks Sun through strategy.

It is not only external obstacles but the inexperience of the young lovers which must be overcome, requiring Ying-ying's maid, Hung-niang, to act as the catalyst of passion. The special role of Hung-niang has been remarked upon by critics who note that she is not only Wang's own contribution to the earlier ballad versions of the story but comes to overshadow her mistress for her personality and range of action.[22] Her role is crucial in guiding the oscillating emotions of the lovers; her various points of view not only heighten the drama but boldly advance the dramatist's arguments for love which is his true message.

Ultimately, she functions to bring the phase of union to its apogee when an assignation is arranged in a special world which might be termed the "lyric capsule." This is an enclosed realm located at the heart of the drama, a place where the conventional spatial, temporal and social relationships of the outside are suspended. It is presented less in terms of fixed, concrete phenomena than in images reflecting the psychological states of its inhabitants. Earlier, Ying-ying's quarters in the western chamber are merely described as a set of rooms around a courtyard bounded by a wall on the other side of which is Chang's dwelling. As the lovers converge, however, it becomes transformed into a synasthesiac universe of qualities attached to such lyric images as the moon and incense and to the special modes of poetic and musical communication.

The momentary nature of the lyric capsule renders it highly vulnerable to sequential time, social imperatives and external aggression. Following the lovers' consummation, the comic cycle quickly turns to

separation in which the genius is propelled along the orthodox path to prove himself in the world of the state while the beauty languishes in tragic solitude. During this phase, there is a moment of reversal in which the tragic momentum shifts back to a comic one. In *The Western Chamber,* this is signified by Chang's success at the examinations enabling him to return with the suitable rank to overcome Mme. Ts'ui's objections. The final phase of reunion presents the defeat and expulsion of the remaining anti-comic forces and the reconstitution of society around the lovers, now granted recognition in the ritual of marriage. Conventionally, this is represented in a grand finale where a proclamation by the offstage emperor grants legitimacy to the lovers and official position to the genius.

This archetypal version of the literati romance is a commentary on the orthodox self. There is a neatly maintained inner-outer antithesis between the desires of the lovers and the demands of public activities, a dualism which is continually explored in the course of the play as a major source of dramatic tension. The comic process itself is a revision of the incremental sequence of personal cultivation espoused in *The Great Learning* with the reunion as a symbolic confirmation of the sageliness of the lovers. Of course, the dramatist's particular allegiance is to the emtional nature of the inner self while orthodox philosophers since Chu Hsi have asserted the superiority of the passionless "moral mind" (天心 , *t'ien-hsin*) over the "human mind" (人心 , *jen-hsin*). Yet Wang Shih-fu's characters are motivated by sincerity or the lack of it and he maintains faith in the degree system as an indication of the hero's merit.

With the revival of native Chinese traditions in the mid-14th century, an early form of southern drama or *nan-hsi* (南戲) emerged in the lower Yangtze delta and gradually developed into *ch'uan-ch'i* (傳奇),[23] which remained the major form of literary drama. The appeal of *ch'uan-ch'i* was largely due to its liberation of many of *tsa-chü's* formal restrictions, the use of local arias, music and dialects, and its expanded length which often reached novelistic proportions. The latter tendency, led to plays of more than 60 scenes and reflected the ambition of dramatists to create panoramic works representing all known aspects of human experience. Romantic comedy in the fashion of *The Western Chamber* provided the broadest framework for such totalizing visions and gained even greater popularity. The rise of the *sheng* (生) as the hero's role-type superseding the *mo* (末) of *tsa-chü* indicates a closer identification with the ideal of

the genius; and an obligatory reunion scene shows a shift away from the tragic preoccupations of many leading *tsa-chü* writers.

In its initial phase, *ch'uan-ch'i* remained a somewhat fragmented phenomena due to the variety of local musical styles. By the mid-16th century, however, a new style was perfected by Wei Liang-fu (魏良輔)[24] in the town of Kun-shan, Kiangsu. Named "*k'un-ch'ü*"(崑曲)[25] after the area, it soon spread beyond through the proselytizing efforts of such playwrights as Liang Ch'en-yü (梁辰魚)[26] to become universally accepted amongst literati as the "elegant sound" (雅音 , *ya-yin*). This important change in taste which resulted in the first truely national theatre in China reached its height by the beginning of the 17th century and was noted by a contemporary observer:

> In Nanking before the Wan-li period, nobles, gentry and wealthy families would entertain by having arias performed by several actors or perhaps many actors, singing in the northern style. For instruments, they used the zither, the lute, the banjo and wooden clappers. . . . But later there was a change and they began to use southern arias. Singers employed only one small sea of clappers or a fan as a substitute, perhaps adding a drum or other clappers. Now, people from the Soochow area have added the flute and moon guitar. . . . Southern dramas are performed at large feasts. Originally, there were only two main styles—*I-yang* (弋陽) and *Hai-yen* (海鹽). *I-yang* uses colloquial language and literati from the provinces enjoyed watching it. In *Hai-yen*, there was a lot of the official dialect and it was popular in Nanking and Peking. And now there is also the K'un-shan style. It is clearer and more mellifluous than *Hai-yen* and yet combines both harmony and sudden changes in melody, extending one word for several breaths. The literati have endowed it with their spirit and greatly enjoy it. As for *Hai-yen* and the other styles, they seem to make one want to fall asleep in daytime; and as for northern drama, it is like blowing on flutes and beating clay pots—people are bored with it and even scoff at it . . . .[27]

The spread of drama at this time was aided by the marked increase in publishing. Anthologies such as Mao Chin's (毛晉) *Sixty Plays* (六十種曲 , *Liu-shih-chung-ch'ü*) appeared, defining the corpus and making a wide range of works available to readers. For the prospective writer, there were manuals on aria forms and singing techniques, hitherto passed on orally, were codified to aid the amateur performer. Miscellanies containing discussions of drama helped to elevate taste while critical editions such as Li Chih's commentary on *The Western Chamber* brought serious literary attention to what had been thought of as pure entertainment.[28]

Perhaps the most significant element in the legitimization of drama was a change in the social context of the theatre. Hitherto, there had been a considerable distinction between the amateur theatre of the literati and the professional theatre of the marketplace. The former were held in the mansions of the wealthy where plays, often written by the host himself, were performed by well-trained household troupes for intimate gatherings. The professional theatre, on the other hand, regularly played to a winder, less discriminating audience who demanded eroticism and senesationalism at the expense of poetry, dance and textual fidelity. These two levels began to mix more intimately as literati joined other groups in flocking to the gay quarters of large cities.

In places such as the Ch'in-huai district of Nanking, leading officials, examination candidates, aristocrats, generals and merchants congregated in grand pleasure-houses where they found a degree of glamor and sophistication unavailable in the provinces or in the wealthy mansions. A former denizen later reminisced:

> The houses along the Ch'in-huai River were convenient for lodging, for forming social acquaintances and for carousing. The rates were exhorbitant yet not a day went by when there weren't guests. Painted boats with their Sounds of drums and flutes went back and forth, winding in a circular path. Outside the houses were vermillion balustrades and intricate lattices, bamboo shades and silken drapes. In summer, one could relax on the terrace after taking a bath while from the other riverside pavillions along both banks, the pungeant fragrance of a jasmine breeze excited the men and women. The courtesans would hold round fans of fine white silk as their flowing strands of hair and slightly tilting hair buns attracted men with a soft allure.[29]

The demi-monde of these late Ming salons centered around the leading courtesans, who numbered around thirty and were amongst the earliest "stars." Most were quite accomplished in performance, having been trained by the best professionals. Through the publicity of their well-placed admirers, their interpretations came to surpass in prestige those of household performers. A great patron of the time recalled:

> The theatrical profession was under the Nanking Music Bureau and continued the musical traditions set up from the time of Wu-tsung's Southern Progress (1519). But the famous courtesans and child actresses fear to perform on just any stage. Only when there are excellent musicians

to accompany them and a full crowd will they agree and then only after much persuasion. They sing from behind their round fans as the audience crane their heads to listen. The host becomes greatly excited and will shower a courtesan with gifts, paying her ten times her price. Of these, Tun-jen was famous for her lute solos and Cheng T'o-niang for her southrn arias.[30]

What makes Ch'in-huai so apt a symbol of the early 17th century was the idealistic blending of art and life in its most characteristic ritual. Love was, of course, the principle activity of the quarters and the great event was the celebration of a match between a new degree holder and a young, virginal courtesan. It was, in fact, believed, that the district had been deliberately located across the river from the examination halls so as to facilitate the parade of a successful graduate through the streets on his way to the mock betrothal. The life offstage consciously imitated the romantic comedies onstage as these "geniuses" and "beauties" played out the literati romance in the capsule world of the quarters.

With the arrival of drama at the center of the life of its time, we may now turn to examine its expression in the 17th century with particular focus on how several leading dramatists interpreted the literati romance.

Some Remarks on 17th Century Drama

When T'ang Hsien-tsu (湯顯祖)[31] completed *The Soul's Return (*還魂記 , *Huan-hun-chi)*[32] in 1598, it was quickly recognized as a masterpiece of its time, supposedly eclipsing *The Western Chamber.* Several of its scenes have remained mainstays of the *k'un-ch'ü* repertoire; and the poetic style of the arias spawned a school of followers. Yet T'ang did not seriously turn to writing drama until his fifties, when they became for him vehicles of the values he had unsuccessfully championed in his earlier life.

Born into a landed literati family in Lin-ch'üan, Kiangsi, T'ang studied with Lo Ju-fang (羅汝芳), a major philosopher in the Wang Yang-ming line who was active in private academies. As has been pointed out in a recent study,[33] Lo's main contribution to theories on the substance of the mind was the concept of "vitality (生 , *sheng*), a spontaneously generating life force. Like the views of many other late Ming thinkers, this went

beyond the moral focus of Wang's "awareness of the good" to unleash a deeper, more subconscious level of spiritualized instinct. Lo's teachings had a formative influence on T'ang's passion for direct experience of life as well as his later belief in genuine emotion as the highest realization of "vitality."

T'ang's brilliance in letters became evident early on. At the age of 23, he became a metropolitan graduate and began his career in Nanking, rising to secretary in the Ministry of Rites. Throughout, he maintained an affinity with the ideals of the political activists which brought him into conflict with the grand secretaries. On one occasion, he refused a useful friendship with the son of Chang Chü-cheng (張居正), alienating that powerful figure and in 1589, sent in a widely read memorial criticizing one of Chang's successors, Shen Shih-hsing. He was consequently demoted and banished to an aboriginal area of Kwangtung. Although rehabilitated four years later, he became embroiled in further investigations. T'ang's idealism, confidence in his talents and combative, polemical nature combined to circumscribe his political career and he prudently retired at the age of 48 to avoid further reprisals. The remaining twenty or so years of his life were spent back on his estate in Lin-ch'uan where writing poetry and drama, directing his household troupe and the company of sympathetic friends occupied his energies.

Given T'ang's philosophical and political allegiances, it is not surprising that in literature, he avowed values similar to the Kung-an school's. Like Yuan Hung-tao, with whom he corresponded, he decried the utilitarianism of didacticists and exalted the artist as romantic hero whose truth derives from giving imaginative form to his inspiration:

> One should never talk to old Confucians about literature. They haven't heard nor seen much in their lives and yet they try to discuss it according to their common, constricted knowledge. How could anything be written? I say, the marvel of literature lies not in treading behind others or achieving a likeness but in that natural, spiritual energy which suddenly arrives, and unconsciously reaches its fulfillment. Strange and unique—nothing can describe it. Nor can it be captured by the ordinary kind of subject matter.[34]

This antipathy to imposed authority in matters of creativity was voiced with equal determination in connection with the major debate within drama circles at that time. As the *k'un-ch'ü* style gained legitimacy, a group of writers arose who attempted to define the correct form of airas. Often

termed the Formalist school (格律派 ; *ko-lü-p'ai*) they centered around Shen Ching (沈璟)[35] in Soochow, who, through his dramas and such manuals as *A Complete Collection of Southern Aria Forms* (南曲全譜, *Nan-ch'ü ch'üan-p'u*) posed as the arbiter of the correct style. T'ang's plays were admired when they appeared but declared unmusical because of their technical shortcomings. He, on the other hand, vigorously reacted by defending the prerogative of the creative process as the primary determinant of form:

> The phrase "what one needs to know in singing is not entirely necessary in writing" is a lofty notion. For all literature is based on the author's intention, a distinctive flavor, a transcendental quality and aestetic beauty. When these four are present, there may be a particularly fine phrase or note which can be used. At such a time, should one follow exactly the rules about the nine musical modes or the four linguistic tones? If I had to subordinate the words to the tones, then the obstruction would be excruciating and I wouldn't be able to write the line.[36]

In *The Soul's Return,* T'ang follows the superstructure of the literati romance, developing from a few scattered anecdotes the love story of the beauty Tu Li-niang and the genius Liu Meng-mei. Within the broad conventions of the genre, however, T'ang's highly original imagination explores planes of existence beyond the human; and through the character of Tu Li-niang, he creates a heroic figure of authenticity who awakens to the power of her emotions and struggles to sustain them against forces which symbolize the rational perception of reality.

In a preface, T'ang wrote:

> Has there ever been a woman so full of emotion as Tu Li-niang? She fell in love after dreaming of her lover and declined to the point where, after painting a portrait of herself for posterity, she died. Then, after three years, she was able to contact the object of her dreams from the underworld and achieve rebirth. Anyone resembling Li-niang could truly be called "consumed with emotion. . . ."[37]

Initially, Li-niang appears similar to Ying-ying—the daughter of a prefect living an existence circumscribed by manners, family authority and her own inexperience. But when lured by her servant, Spring Fragrance, to the mansion's forbidden garden, she ventures into a natural scene which mirrors her long suppressed desires. In scene 10, "The

Interrupted Dream," T'ang achieves a quintessential evocation of a sixteen year-old maiden who alternates between an inhibiting shyness and a blossoming confidence before finally giving way to her yearnings for a lover. As she journeys, sensual images of the garden confirm in life what she had only been vicariously aware of through artifice:

> Flying clouds of dawn, rolling storm at dusk pavilion in emerald shade against the sunset glow fine threads of rain, petals borne on breeze gilded pleasure-boats in waves of mist: sights little treasured by the cloistered maid who sees them only on a painted screen.[38]

For a lyric poet, nature is the primary scene of meaning in which self identifies with universals; for Tu Li-niang, it is a source of liberation as well. However, as a concrete phenomenon, the garden is limited compared to the stretches of the imagination. Li-niang turns to discourse on the great lovers of literature and she feels the ironic lack of a human complement in this otherwise perfect lyric capsule. To solve the dilemma, T'ang has annexed the fantasy world of dream as a co-equal realm of truth. "Why shouldn't the emotions of our dreams be real?" he asked.[39] Through the Buddhist concept of karma, the lovers already exist in each other's minds so that from the beginning of the drama, they can appear to each other in the non-waking state; in fact, they only meet physically mid-way through the plot. After her stroll in the garden, Li-niang returns to her bedchamber, falls asleep and once again sees Liu. Now, however, he appears as lover and they retrace the walk through the garden to consummate their spiritual love in this montage of dimensions overlapping the objective world with the mind.

The innovative nature of this composite capsule is conveyed largely through T'ang's unique verbal style. His language is composed of an elegant, opulent diction and a preference for images ranging from the exquisite to the rusticated, all given a depth of allusiveness which delights the erudite reader. These images are heightened by their juxtaposition along a highly ambiguous syntax which maximizes a sense of discontinuity, blending the contours of objects and resisting a logical organization of relations in order to achieve the resonance of emotional perception.

In addition to the subconscious life of dream, the after-life of the underworld becomes another overlapping existence. After her experience in the garden, Li-niang tries to recapture the moment and in a particularly

tragic scene, returns to the garden, trying to invoke Liu in vain. This setback to her will leads to her physically wasting away. Shortly before her death, she paints a picture of herself at the height of her beauty—an "authentic portrait" (眞容,*chen-jung*)—which stands as her surrogate as she journeys below. There, she faces her greatest challenge in the form of the legalism of the King of the Underworld, who would try her for unchastity. In her passionate defense, T'ang shows Li-niang to be a far more courageous figure than conventional heroines such as Ying-ying, who merely languishes in sorrow during the period of separation. Through a clever ploy, Li-niang outwits the tribunal in their own terms by arguing that the assignation was a spiritual one and she is therefore technically unblemished.

Throughout, T'ang seeks to demonstrate that the normal understanding of our existence only impedes a higher insight into our emotional sensiblity, stating:

> Human affairs cannot be fully fathomed from the perspective of human existence and he who is not a universal man will forever be trying to classify them in terms of rational principles. But I say, how can you be so sure that emotion does not exist in those realms beyond that of reason?[40]

During her infernal odyssey, Li-niang has been able to communicate with Liu in dream and leads him to her grave where he recognizes the portrait. When granted rebirth by the tribunal, she has him disinter her body and emerges resurrected in her original state of beauty. This is the moment of reversal in the plot which T'ang uses to represent "transformation." The shocking and sensational aspect of the scene dramatizes the emergence of the authentic self into the social world as the lovers meet each other physically for the first time.

Confucian orthodoxy, T'ang's favorite target, remains their major obstacle as characterized in the tutor, Ch'en Tsui-liang and Li-niang's father, Prefect Tu. Earlier, Ch'en has appeared as a parody of the old Confucian teacher, a pathetic, ennervated drone whose vitality has been crushed by the cannonical tradition he imposes on Li-niang. In Scene 7, "The Schoolroom," Spring Fragrance taunts him mercilessly. Her clever and often risque puns debunk his didactic interpretation of *The Book of Songs* and reveal the classic for what it really is—an anthology containing many frank love poems.

If Ch'en is befuddled by a false tradition, Prefect Tu is a prisoner of his logic which cannot accept the extraordinary journey of his daughter. Upon seeing her after her rebirth, his natural fatherly feelings are overridden by the seeming impossibility of the situation; and he later subjects Liu to a beating when the latter appears to ask for her hand in marriage. For all the prefect's success as a benevolent public official, his private emotions are penned up within the bounds of rectitude and he remains intractable until the very end. The reunion scene is one of the most agonistic in the genre. Liu, despite his conventional qualifications of a degree and military success, is still rejected as a suitor by the prefect, who regards his daughter as a ghost. Only the offstage emperor, after ordering an empirical test of Li-niang's mortality, has the sagely perspective to decide in favor of the lovers, forcing Prefect Tu's acquiescence.

The historical position of T'ang's play made it a forceful expression of the Wan-li era's optimism over the role of will and imagination in the struggle of the individual. Its faith in the triumph of the subjective mind, the interrelationship of art and life and the general elegance of tone typifies this period's style in drama. It was the poetic lyricism of T'ang's arias in particular which gave rise to a number of followers often termed the School of Diction (辭彩派 , *tz'u-ts'ai-p'ai*). One of the members of this group, Juan Ta-ch'eng (阮大鋮),[41] was amongst the finest mid-century playwrights, reflecting the developing crisis in late Ming values.

Like T'ang, Juan was a wealthy literatus who succeeded in the examination system and became involved in the central issues of his time. As a young degree holder at the end of the Wan-li period, he had some connections with the political activists of the Tung-lin but was passed over by them in favor of someone closer when an important appointment opened up. In response, he allied with the infamous clique of Wei Chung-hsien (魏忠賢) and Ts'ui Ch'eng-hsiu (崔呈秀) which promoted his career during the T'ien-ch'i reign (1621-7). For some reason, the ambitious Juan, who managed to survive the purge of Wei in 1626, became a target of the activists. He was subsequently demoted and continued to be vilified as a traitor to the reformist cause.

During these years, the strain on the Ming dynasty was becoming apparent. The opposition between the activists and various court factions broke out into bloody purges and counter-purges. Not only was the attention of the bureaucracy diverted from practical matters but the

activists, in their brief moments in power, showed themselves to be scarcely more tolerant or competent than their enemies, tarnishing the lustre of their youthful zeal. Meanwhile, the prosperity on which the Ming had expanded began to wane. There were urban strikes by disaffected workers and more seriously, brigandage and revolt in the countryside as farmers, unable to sustain several centuries of mounting taxation, left the land and joined peasant armies. Meanwhile, on the borders, Mongol and Manchu tribes were breaching the defenses of the empire, exacting costly tribute. As is often the case on the eve of great historical change, there was little sense amongst literati of an impending apocalypse and life in the major cities became even more insouciant, devoted to the pursuit of taste and pleasure.

In the 1630's, Juan, like many members of the gentry, left his estate when threatened by bandits and sought refuge in Nanking. There, he established an elegant mansion and assembled a notable household troupe considered amongst the finest. An acquaintance recalled:

> Juan Ta-ch'eng's household troupe specialized in staging highly dramatic incidents, in emotional conflict, and in complicated plots; other troupes seemed crude by comparison. And they only performed plays written by the owner whose inner struggles were apparent in every word and in the grand design as well. This further distinguished them from the vulgar style of others. . . .[42]

Juan was also an enthusiastic patron of the gay quarters of Ch'in-huai and active in the demi-monde, as aesthete, dramatist, and as a politician seeking to return to public life. Still controversial, he found himself attacked by activists in the Fu-she but when Peking fell in 1644, he was able to briefly regain power in the Nanking Restoration of 1644-5. The tale of his revenge on those who kept him in retirement for 17 years became part of another drama which we shall discuss. Unfortunately his unsavory politics and subsequent vilification in history has obscured the merit of his dramas for later readers.

His most noted work, *The Swallow Note* (燕子箋 , *Yen-tzu-chien*)[43] reflects the exquisite delicacy of his art. Juan consciously looked to T'ang as a model and claimed to have surpassed the master for having written his arias in correct *k'un-ch'ü* style. Juan did not advance a philosophical argument for authenticity, however. Rather, he celebrates a world of glamour and spontaneous love in which the real challenges come from

vicissitudes and ambition for success.

The play is essentially a comedy of errors in which the genius, Huo Tu-liang, falls in love with two heroines. Although the dual-heroine formula is often used to contrast domestic virtue and seductive beauty, here, Huo's lovers are both beauties. Mirror images of one another, they are distinguished only by class: one, Hua Hsing-yun is a courtesan and the other, Li Fei-yun, the daughter of a high minister.

The earlier scenes are the ones most often performed for they present the capsule world in which Huo, who is in the capital awaiting the examinations, spends his time falling in love with Hsing-yun. Juan's presentation of nature consummate in artistry and always tasteful. His language is as ambiguous as T'ang's but far more allusive, requiring an even greater command of the poetic tradition. The verbal filligree, however, matches the baroque fascination for inflated expression and complex convolutions of plot.

While on a spring outing, Huo paints a love scene, "A Butterfly Fluttering by a Singing Oriole," which includes their portraits. This becomes the vehicle for introducing Fei-yun. As a result of a mix-up at the mounting shop, Fei-yun receives the portraits while Huo is given a picture she owns of the Goddess of Mercy. Fei-yun is struck by the beauty of Huo and is inspired to write a love note which is unexpectedly snatched by a swallow who brings it to Huo. In true romantic manner, he falls ill out of longing for the writer and seems to have no hope of discovering her identity.

The confusion of the paintings and the swallow note are moments of "transformation." But unlike the resurrection of Li-niang, they do not serve as a climatic reversal in the plot. They are first causes in an imbroglio which Juan concatenates even further with the vicissitudes of historical events. Due to the An Lu-shan rebellion, all are forced to flee and accept different identities in order to survive. Fei-yun is separated from her mother on the road and comes under the protection of a friendly general; Hsing-yun is mistaken by Fei-yun's mother for her daughter and agrees to substitute; and Huo goes to serve the very general who is protecting Fei-yun but under an assumed name. Eventually, the rebellion is quelled and the society begins to sort itself out, aided by the catalyst of a lady doctor who had served both heroines.

The reunion resolves Huo's dilemma by marrying Fei-yun to him as

first wife and Hsing-yun as concubine but before that, Juan introduces a final obstruction. The hero's companion and alter-ego, Hsien-yü Chi, has been, on the surface, an amiable friend. Beneath, he is revealed as fearful of his limited talent and obsessed with career to the point where he has bribed an examination official to switch his paper with Huo's. The juxtaposition of the latter's innocent passion with Hsien-yü's amoral ambition reflects Juan's understanding of the dual tendencies in human nature which were unleashed by the pursuit of authenticity. The roots of both aspects lay in the reliance on the inner sanction of one's desires which Juan observed led to personal aggrandizement in public life. Retaining his faith in art and love, he has Fei-yun expose the false graduate and identify Huo as the genuine genius.

In another of his plays, *Riddles on Spring Lanterns* (春燈迷, *Ch'un-teng-mi*), Juan repeats the theme of the innocence of the lovers derailed by the mechanics of life, this time, focusing on society's tendency to deceive and be deceived. Like *The Swallow Note,* the play is a comedy of errors but with a far more complicated plot and a lessening of the purely lyric aspects. The genius Yü-wen Yen and the beauty Wei Ying-niang meet at a temple celebration of the lantern festival where both have deciphered the riddles; Ying-niang is disguised as a man, however, in order to attend and Yü-wen thinks of her as a companion. They return to their respective boats on which they are travelling with their families, only to board the wrong ones in their inebriated states. This sets into motion a series of ten errors including mistaken murders, assumed identities, disguises and impersonations the final reunion scene. The confused world which Juan creates reflects his anxiety about a reality which may no longer be comprehensible to those in it, where mere will, good intentions or authentic commitment is insufficient to prevail over complexity and increasing disarray. There are no characters in the play who have the sagely perspective but each reacts predictably according to their limited understanding. Only one character, a storyteller from the palace (no doubt a persona of Juan himself) emerges at the end to recite a ballad, "The Recognition of Ten Errors" (十錯認, *Shih-ts'o-jen*), in which the entire plot is reviewed and the identities of the members of the audience are restored.

Juan represents a certain culmination in the high style of drama while at the same time, his concept of plot opened the way for another dramatist,

Li Yü (李漁), who represents the professional writer and director. The collapse of the Ming in the mid-1640's and the consequent havoc caused by the Manchu conquest had a great effect on the theatre. Not only were great centers such as Yangchow damaged but the southern literati who were the backbone of *k'un-ch'ü* drama were dislocated. Many had lost large parts of their wealth, others fled their estates, a number of them lost their official status in the dynastic change while loyalist sentiment kept leading survivors of the late Ming out of public life. The fading away of the old gentility and the reduced circumstances which many found themselves in gave an even greater role to the professionals and to dramas which were both entertaining and economically viable to produce.

Li Yü[44] was born into a literati family that had seen better days but he distinguished himself at an early age, earning the licentiate degree in 1635 when he was 24 and developing a reputation for his essay style. Subsequent failure in the examinations, and peasant rebellions kept him at home in Lan-ch'i, Chekiang. During the years of the Manchu conquest, he withdrew further into the countryside enjoying the pleasures of gentlemanly living while lamenting the lack of proper opportunities. When the military situation stabilized, Li went out to support his large family through a variety of literary ventures such as professional writing, publishing and bookselling in the more lucrative cities of Hangchow and Nanking. It was also necessity which led him to organize his own drama troupe and travel widely, performing for the new elite of the early Ch'ing. At one point, his troupe reached over forty members including several of his concubines and they journeyed to places as distant as Peking and Kansu.

As a personality, Li recalls such figures as Liang Ch'en-yü and Kuan Han-ch'ing (關漢卿) in that he was an articulate literatus forced to turn to the theatre for a living who was able to elevate popular styles to a higher level of artistry and self-consciousness. Like them, he was also hedonistic, epicurean, bombastic, and took a sly delight in shocking conventional opinion with his publicized love affairs. In this, he continued the individualistic strain of the late Ming represented by Wang Ken and Li Chih. By avowing the pleasures of human existence and seeking to realize them in his own small world, he kept alive the ideal of authenticity in an era of upheaval and doubt.

As a dramatist, Li Yü can be seen as having perfected the kind of plot which Juan Ta-ch'eng had earlier developed. All of his plays are imbroglios

which result from an initial error and the main interest lies in the unfolding mechanism of the plot. In his drama criticism, for which he has been justly regarded as the leading theorist, he asserted

> When the ancients created a work of literature, they established the "main device" (主腦, *chu-nao*) of the piece. This is nothing else by the basic intention behind the author's expression. *Ch'uan-ch'i* drama is the same. Within a play, there innumerable characters but in the end, they are all supportive. Based on the author's first thoughts, the play is set up around one character. And this character, from beginning to end, goes through separation, reunion, sadness and happiness—an unlimited number of emotions and an unfathomable number of situations. In the end, however, they are all interpolations. Based on the author's first thoughts, the play is set up around one incident. And if this singularity of character and incident is sufficiently astonishing and unique, if it is really worthy of transmitting and is then transmitted, then the name "*chuan-ch'i*" meaning "transmitting the unique" will not be in vain. . . .[45]

"*Ch'i*" (奇) or the "unique" was a value frequently spoken of by 17th century literary critics and had a double-edged meaning. It was associated with the nexus of authentic qualities and referred to that which was distinct, unprecedented and sensational. But such uniqueness was meaningful only because it was able to signify, in a startling way, some universal truth. Li Yü reflected the mid-century shift towards realism. The "main devices" of his play, though highly original, are almost all plausible and could conceivably occur in everyday life. As elements in a well-made structure, they also give Li's dramas a highly abstract quality as permutations of the dualities of the literati romance.

A good example of Li's style is *The Kite Mix-Up* (風箏誤 , *Feng-cheng wu*) which revolves around the mistakes caused when kites flown by the genius and his companion fall into the courtyards of two beauties. Chi Shih, friend of the hero Han Shih-hsun, has asked Han to paint a kite for him and Han appends a poem expressing hope of finding a mate. This kite falls by mistake into the courtyard of Shu-chüan, the stunning daughter of an official, Chang Wu-ch'eng, and a concubine, née Liu. Shu-chüan writes a moving reply and returns the kite to Chi's servant who passes it, however, on to Han. Buoyed by the response, Han paints another kite and flies it himself. This time, it falls into the courtyard of Ai-chüan, the ugly sister of Shu-chüan, daughter of the jealous concubine, n'ee Mei. Desperate for love, Ai-chüan hastens to arrange an assignation but in the

farcial encounter at night, Han is shocked to find her both untalented and repulsive; he flees for his life and later has nightmares about her. Subsequently, he goes off to the capital where he scores highest in the examinations and is sent to serve on the front with Chan Wu-ch'eng.

Meanwhile, Chi's father has been entrusted by Chan with arranging the marriage of the girls and marries his son to Ai-chüan, the ugly one. Grieviously dissappointed, Chi Shih refuses to accept her unless he is allowed to take a concubine. This is agreed to and he schemes at forcing Shu-chüan to join his household. She resists his lustful attack and defends herself with a sword. Upon Han's return from the front, he is betrothed to Shu-chüan as the daughter of his patron. He still believes that she is the one who arranged the encounter and though inwardly opposed, he cannot alienate Chan. His inner turmoil surfaces, though, after the wedding when the couple is alone in the wedding chamber. Han has not yet seen her face, which is veiled in the customary manner and declares her unchaste. The potential scandal is averted by Concubine Liu who unveils Shu-chüan and convinces Han that she is not the one who tried to seduce him. Han is delighted to perform his marital duties and after a settling of scores between the two rival concubines, the harmonious family welcomes the patriarch back.

Li's parody of the conventions of the literati romance is quite apparent for he had scant reverence for genteel figures perambulating through gardens in the high style. His characters have healthy appetites and pursue their desires with a blundering directness which Li knew how to exploit for maximum humor. The scenes which are most often performed such as "Frightened by Her Ugliness" (驚醜, *Ching-ch'ou*) and "Forced into Marriage" (逼婚, *Pi-hun*) are those in which people are reduced to their simplest drives and land in webs of their own weaving. For this reason, they often appear as symbolic counters of virtues and flaws. The ugly and the beautiful, the rich and the poor, honesty and duplicity, brilliance and stupidity are the ever-present dualities, familiar magnetic poles which help structure the undulating plots and reassure the reader that what seems like a complex world is really very simple.

If his characters lack psychological depth or a lofty sensibility, they nevertheless have a strong impact on the audience through highly effective dialogue. Hitherto, dialogue tended to be excessively literary or ignored by playwrights who expected performers to interpolate it onstage. One of

Li Yü's theoretical essays emphasizes the importance of speech along with arias, likening their relationship to that between commentary and text, or arteries and limbs.[46] In *The Kite Mix-up*, the quarrels of the concubines, the seduction scenes and the outrage of those who find themselves mismatched are expressed in a vivid, realistic speech which is second only to the plot in generating a fast-moving pace.

Amongst some critics, Li Yü's concern for such surface values and architectonics renders his work amusing but trivial.[47] Farceurs, however, have often had difficulty gaining respect from the serious-minded. If anything, Li was the master craftsman of the Chinese well-made play with a faultless instinct for humor. To look for deeper motivations, one would have to turn to his essentially ebullient personality which concealed, I think, disillusion and a strong sense of irony. Somewhere in the disparity between the grandeur of the late Ming romance and the demeaning banality of his struggle for prosperity lies the reason for his artful laughter at literati ideals.

By the latter decades of the 17th century, a new generation had grown up for whom the late Ming had already become history. The events of that era were only known to them vicariously, through the tales of survivors, or the memoris of participants. By the 1680's, at least, it had become clear that the new Ch'ing dynasty had consolidated its rule and a new era of peace engaged the loyalities of the native majority. The price for this was a more authoritarian state in which imperial power played a greater role. The Manchus, as foreigners with little culture of their own, found it convenient to rule in the Chinese manner and imposed a more stringent orthodoxy than had ever existed before. Once again, the classics were reedited and the orthodox path assumed an even greater importance as the primary determinant of literati status.

With the revival of orthodox ideals, there was a corresponding change in attitude away from the School of the Mind. Indeed, certain influential Neo-Confucians blamed Wang Yang-ming and his followers for the fall of the Ming, seeing in their subjectivism, spirituality, and populism, the source of decadence and decline.[49] A new intellectual movement arose designed to reorient the process of personal cultivation back towards rationalism. Often termed the School of Empirical Studies (考證學, *k'ao-cheng-hsueh*) it emphasized textual sources, factual accuracy and scholarly methods as indicated by its motto, "Seek the truth by confirming facts" (實事求是 ,

shih-shih ch'iu-shih).[50] The experience of the late Ming, however, still continued to fascinate readers and at the end of the century, there was a resurgence of histories, memoris, novels and dramas dealing with the dynastic change. One such drama, *The Peach Blossom Fan* (桃花扇 , *T'ao-hua-shan*) by K'ung Shang-jen (孔尚任),[51] appeared in 1699. As the greatest historical drama, it explored the fate of the authentic self with an unprecedented degree of realism.

K'ung was well-suited to attempt such a broad assessment. As a member of the 64th generation of descent from Confucius, he grew up in the atmosphere of the shrine complex in Ch'ü-fu, Shantung. Since the Han, the shrine had been a point of pilgrimage for all who sought to pay homage to the Sage and the K'ung clan carefully maintained what it considered to be the genuine Confucian tradition. K'ung Shang-jen's own specialty was ritual and music. In the spirit of the School Empirical Studies, he researched the classics for the original Chou forms, had new sacrificial vessels cast and trained students in the performance of ancient ceremonies.

While K'ung shared his age's faith in facts, he was also a poet with a great admiration for a lost romantic past. A number of his older relatives had been known for their loyalty to the Ming and in his youth, he met several famous survivors. A cousin of his had been associated with the Restoration Court. K'ung indirectly heard his tales of adventure and intrigue as well as the incident of a famous painter converting the blood stains on a courtesan's fan into peach blossoms.

Though imbued with Confucianism and the classics, K'ung had neither the functional knowledge nor the patronage to succeed in the examination system and languished until the K'ang-hsi Emperor visited Ch'ü-fu in 1684. The Emperor was much impressed with K'ung as a symbol of the genuine Confucian tradition and began him on his official career by appointing him a doctor in the National University in Peking.

From 1686-9, K'ung went south to assist in a river control project centered in Yangchow. There, his duties were light and he had the leisure to travel about, visiting many of the cities and sights connected with the late Ming. He was also a lavish host and gathered a cross-section of painters, poets, officials and gentry including many old survivors who doubtless further enriched his collection of anecdotes. Upon his return to Peking, he began writing his major drama which was completed some ten years later.

K'ung is often simplified as a nationalist writer who was critical of the

Manchu rulers but this attitude towards his present was far more ambivalent. He well recognized the material benefits of the Ch'ing dynasty and was properly grateful for the unusual preferment he had received from K'ang-hsi. But he lamented the loss of a native spirit of heroism as well as the disappearance of the gracious, aesthetic life of the old southern gentry. K'ung had a fascination for human typology and cultivated a wide range of acquaintances wherever he traveled. The friends towards whom he felt the greatest loyalty, however, were not the conventional, success-oriented politicians but recluses, indigent artists and eccentric poets—those of distinctive vision who had the determination to live their values irregardless of social fashion. One senses that it was K'ung's surety of his own origins which led him to admire such figures and which endowed him with a wide cultural perspective.

As a dramatist, K'ung was not in the mold of T'ang Hsien-tsu or Li Yü. He had no troupe of his own and little experience in the theatre; and he relied upon a professional *k'un-ch'ü* teacher in order to write his arias correctly. In deciding to create a panoramic view of the late Ming, he turned to *ch'uan-ch'i* because he saw it as a synthesis of all the major literary forms which would allow a maximum breadth and complexity of expression. In a preface, he wrote:

> Although *Ch'uan-ch'i* may be considered a lesser art, it contains all other forms such as poetry, *fu* rhyme-prose, *tz'u* lyrics and *ch'ü* arias, parallel prose and fiction. As for presenting character and evoking scenery, it matches the techniques of painting. Its nature is like that of the book of *Poetry* while its themes reflect the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. And stylistically, there is much from the *Tso Commentary*, the *Airs of the States* and Ssu-ma Ch'ien. For awakening the world and transforming it according to the Sagely Way, it has the most immediate effect.[52]

Most romantic comedies followed the practice of employing conventional settings such as the T'ang and Sung periods. These had an aura of grandeur, ready-made associations with capitals and rebellions, and avoided suspicion of commenting on current politics. K'ung wrote the first great historical drama which was not only based on factual research but dealt with events of contemporary relevance. Several prefaces indicate the extent of his scholarly approach. One contains a list of references indicating that he consulted historical works, literary collections and dramas written by major figures of the time. Others indicate his own process of writing

the play, how to read it and an allegorical arrangement of the cast in metaphysical, moral and structural categories.[53]

The play presents the love story of the young literatus Hou Fang-yü and the Ch'in-huai courtesan, Li Hsiang-chün set amidst the events of the fall of the Ming dynasty. Hou comes to Nanking in 1643 to take the examinations and becomes active in the politics of the Fu-she activists who are attempting to prevent the villain Juan Ta-ch'eng from returning to power. He also patronizes the gay quarters where he is matched with the virginal beauty, Hsiang-chün. Juan hopes to gain Hou's friendship by contributing the trousseau but is rejected, thus incurring his enmity. When Peking falls in 1644, others come to Nanking to join in restoring Prince Fu to the throne. The Restoration Court quickly becomes dominated by Juan and Ma Shih-ying who begin a purge of their opponents. Hou is slandered at court and forced to flee the city and take refuge with a friendly general. Hsiang-chün likewise falls victim by being forcibly kidnapped into the palace troupe in order to perform *The Swallow Note.* Before being carried off, Hsiang-chün resists and damages a fan Hou has given her with bloodstains. The painter Yang Wen-ts'ung is inspired to convert the stains into peach blossoms and the fan is transformed into a message of love. Upon receiving the fan, Hou journeys back to Nanking in search of Hsiang-chün.

Meanwhile, the tensions within the Restoration mount. The loose confederation of generals defending the capital fragments due to jealousy while the purges and executions in Nanking grow. When the Manchu forces approach the Yangtze in 1645, panic spreads and the Ming dissolves amidst suicides, betrayals and ignoble escapes. In the confusion, Hou comes across Hsiang-chün at a taoist monastery. At long last reunited, they are about to renew their love affair when the abbot lectures them and induces an enlightenment leading to their tragic renunciation of the world and withdrawal into religious cultivation.

By recreating late Ming Ch'in-huai as the lyric capsule, K'ung evokes nostalgia for its antebellum glamour. He peoples the stage with the famous denizens well-known to readers of 17th century memoirs and in such scenes as "Visiting the House of Emerald Warmth" (訪翠, *Fang-ts'ui*), has them renact the unique customs of the quarter. Yet there are recurrent moments of irony when the playworld's illusion of insularity is dispelled by the intrusion of politics. The presence of Juan Ta-ch'eng's trousseau in the

bedchamber unbeknownst to the lovers is symbolic of a fundamental pollution which few of the characters are able to grasp.

It is Hsiang-chün who bears the tragic consequences of this. In her first appearance, she is shown studying the plays of T'ang Hsien-tsu and is pointedly compared to those two earlier heroines, Ying-ying and Li-niang. Educated to live authentically, it is precisely her assertion of moral purity which is the cause of her separation from her lover: Hsiang-chün, in an impassioned aria, insists on rejecting Juan's gift thus provoking his revenge. Later, when she reviles him at a gathering, it only leads to her subsequent kidnapping by his agents. Her belief in the power of autonomous action, in righteous resistance and following one's impassioned instincts victimizes her as much as any villain. In Hsiang-chün, the traditional beauty is thrust into the real world of objective forces where her heroism becomes self-destructive.

If K'ung's judgement of the heroine leaves the reader with a sense of ambivalence, this is equally true with regards to Juan as the villain. The author was fascinated by him as an example of the corruption of the ideal of the genius. Juan was, of course, the great dramatist and aesthete whose ambition led him to betray the activists and who suffered ostracism for years. While there is no doubt of K'ung's larger moral view of him, (in the allegorical chart of the cast, he is classified as an "Evil Force,") there is also sympathy for him as an artist who may have been forced into his role by the excessive zeal of the activists. In Scene 4, "The Play's the Thing" (偵 戲, *Chen-hsi*),[54] the painter Yang Wen-ts'ung visits Juan in his mansion and we see him as man of taste and inspired writer. The activists ask to borrow his troupe to view a performance of *The Swallow Note* to which he gladly assents, hoping that they will understand his true self through the work. But they continue to revile him and the focus is on Juan and Yang as they receive this additional provocation. In criticizing the Fu-she as well as Juan, K'ung expressed an unsually balanced view of late Ming politics. Like K'ang-hsi, he saw the dynastic collapse as the effect of uncompromising factionalism amongst all parties.

In a play as populous as this—there are thirty major characters according to the author's count—the number of catlysts is unusually high. The most effective one is Yang Wen-ts'ung who, as patron of the quarters and friend to all, has maximum access to all the worlds of the play. It is he who introduces the lovers, arranges for Juan to donate the trousseau

and paints the peach blossom fan. In one sense, he represents pure vitality. As one of the great painters of the late Ming, his actions reflect the same kind of exuberant energy associated with the mode of "brushing one's intentions" (寫意, *hsieh-i*). This spontaneity in his relationships, however, results in a pervasive amorality as he plays at life with little thought of the wider consequences. Yang must stand very close to K'ung's own experience as a socialite in Yangchow and Peking and it is for this reason that he does not receive the judgements of "praise and blame" meted out to the other characters. When the dynasty falls, he simply slips offstage unnoticed.

Not every character contains the multiplicity of perspectives which results in ambivalence. Both inside and outside of the world of the play, several characters exist who maintain a continuity of vision and who are the vehicles of the author's ideals. Within the late Ming setting, the storyteller Liu Ching-t'ing expresses the sagely perspective as companion to the hero and denizen of Ch'in-huai. Historically, Liu was much celebrated in the early Ch'ing. Though barely literate, he became an important advisor to the general Tso Liang-yü and for a brief moment, had a powerful influence in Nankiang.[55] After the fall, he returned to storytelling and traveled widely, being received by literati as a heroic loyalist. The dramatic Liu represents the true insight of popular literature and stands in contrast to the elite decadence around him. Through his ballads about Confucius and his entertaining jokes, he seeks to alert his audience to the danger of the political situation as well as presage the demise of the Restoration. That K'ung should turn to a member of the lower classes for this role is indicative of a wave of primitivism amongst dramatists at this time which viewed the old establishment as having lost its capacity to lead. Liu is comparable to the balladeer Ts'ao Shan-ts'ai in Wu Wei-yeh's (吳偉業) *Springtime in Nanking* (秣稜春 , *Mo-ling-ch'un*) or the musician Li Kuei-nien in Hung Sheng's (洪昇) *The Palace of Eternal Youth* (長生殿 , *Ch'ang-sheng-tien*). All three are but lowly artisans yet maintain the native spirit through cataclysmic change.

Complementing Liu on the outside of the action is K'ung's persona, The Old Man of Ceremonies. He appears in the prologue acts to both parts of the play which are set forty years later, in 1684, when he is 97. The prologues serve as a frame for the action which is then presented as a flashback with The Old Master as an anonymous Ming official in charge of Confucian rituals. This as well as the fact that he shares the same birthdate

as K'ung indicate that he is the author's personal ideal of the sage as survivor. At various points in the action, the Old Master appears to officiate at ceremonies which vainly attempt to harmonize the discordant groups according to the eternal patterns of the classics. Though no more successful than others in combatting the force of historical events, he posesses the most constant vision of all and remains the optimum observer.

The final act of *The Peach Blossom Fan* is a fine summation of the fate of the authentic self. In "Lingering Rhymes" (餘韻 , *Yü-yun*) the ideal figures gather three years after the fall of the Ming and the tragic renunciation of the lovers. Present are The Old Master, Liu Ching-t'ing and the *k'un-ch'ü* teacher Su K'un-sheng. Liu and Su have become a fisherman and a woodcutter, the archetypal roles for recluses while The Old Master continues to officiate at ceremonies in the countryside. They reminisce and then each performs a ballad or set of arias recalling the events of the late Ming. They have barely finished when a Ch'ing official intrudes on the group and attempts to force them into serving the new dynasty; but before he can collar them, they flee into the hills out of sight.

In this scene, K'ung presents authenticity as no longer a state of being which can be realized in contemporary society but a beautiful literary fiction to be re-experienced through the creative memory. The guardians of the flame can only express the vision amongst a few others of like mind; and it remains a vulnerable voice in the wild. This symbolic reunion of narrative and poetic aspects mediated by form is K'ung's comic solution on the literary level to the human tragedy wrought by time. His exaltation of the private imagination is an apt conclusion to the 17th century transformation from a romantic self to an awareness on the brink of modernism.

Notes

1. Wang Yang-ming (王陽明 , 1472-1529) *ming* Shou-jen (守仁), *tzu* Po-an (伯安), *hao* Yang-ming (陽明) was born in Shaohsing, Chekiang into a family of high officials. In his early years, he studied the Ch'eng-chu school of Neo-Confucian orthodoxy and became a provincial graduate in 1492. Subsequently, he attempted to test Chu Hsi's (朱熹) doctrine of "classifying phenomena" by sitting in front of some bamboos for several days to discern the rational principles in them, only to fall ill. Despite disillusionment with orthodoxy,

he became a metropolitan graduate in 1499 and in his government career, distinguished himself in military and judicial affairs. In 1506, he was banished to an aboriginal village for criticizing a palace eunuch and there, in 1508, had his first enlightenment into the immanence of rational principles in the mind which opposed Chu Hsi's belief in their independent, external existence in phenomena. The identification of principle with mind and his "unity of knowledge and action" became the foundation of his philosophy. The remainder of his life saw him return to political affairs with notable successes in bandit supression as well as occasional controversies. He also engaged in teaching and polemical defenses of his ideas, attracting students such as Wang Ken (王艮 , q.v. note 5); in his final years, he articulated the idea of the innate knowledge of the good as the essential substance of the mind. A short biography appears in Goodrich and Fang, ed., *Dictionary of Ming Biography* (New York, 1976), pp. 1408-16; for a study of his thought, see J. Ching, *To Acquire Wisdom: The Way of Wang Yang-ming* (New York, 1976); his conversations have been translated in W.T. Chan, *Instructions in Practical Living* (New York, 1963).

2. *Wang Yang-ming ch'üan-shu* (王陽明全書) (Taipei, 1953), p. 121.
3. P. T. Ho, *The Ladder of Success in Imperial China* (New York: 1962), p. 181. According to Ho, the entire population increased from 65 million in the late 14th century to about 150 million by 1600.
4. See the Yung-lo (永樂) Emperor's preface to *Hsing-li ta-ch'üan* (性理大全 , 1413). This digest, in 70 *chüan*, was compiled by Hu Kuang (胡廣) under imperial commission as a collection of orthodox Neo-Confucian ideas. Together with *Sung-Yuan Hsing-li-hsueh* (宋元性理學), *Wu-ching ta-ch'üan* (五經大全) and *Ssu-shu ta-ch'üan* (四書大全), they provided a much-relied upon summary of the knowledge required by the examination system (科舉). For a study of the examination system, see Miyazaki Ichisada (宮崎市定), *Kakyō* (Osaka, 1946).
5. Wang Ken (王艮 , 1483-1541) original *ming* Yin (銀) *tzu* Ju-chih (汝止), *hao* Hsin-chai (心齋) was born in T'ai-chou, Kiangsu. His education ceased at the age of 10 due to poverty but he continued on his own and often had mystical dreams on philosophical subjects. One such dream convinced him that the mind was indeed the central convergence of the cosmic duality of Heaven and Earth. A trip to the Confucian Shrine in Ch'ü-fu, Shantung further motivated him to study Confucianism and in 1521, he met Wang Yang-ming. His relationship with the master was characterized by impassioned devotion and zealous excess. His eccentricity led to, amongst other things, his wearing of ancient clothing modeled after the Chou period. Later, he formed his own school in T'ai-chou and championed the populist aspect of Wang Yang-ming's teachings. *Goodrich*, pp. 1382-5; a discussion of his thought appears in W. DeBary, "Individualism and Humanitarianism in Late Ming Thought." In W. DeBary ed., *Self and Society in Ming Thought* (New York, 1970), pp.162-78.
6. Ho Hsin-yin (何心隱 , 1517-79) originally Liang Ju-yuan (梁汝元), *tzu*

Fu-shan (夫山), *hao* Kuei-ch'ien (桂乾) was born in Yung-feng, Kiangsi. He earned the licentiate degree in 1546 but obtained no further degrees nor was he successful in holding office. He studied with Yen Chün (顏鈞), a member of the T'ai-chou school (泰州派) and was inspired to adopt a heroic attitude towards social and intellectual problems. He was active as a strategic advisor in bandit supression on several occasions but is most noted for organizing his clan into new units for educational, economic and social benefits as well as promoting collective property and the legitimacy of natural desires. In addition, he organized a residential club in Peking for people from all walks of life. He was indirectly involved in opposition attempts to the Grand Secretaries Yen Sung (嚴嵩) and Chang Chü-cheng (張居正 , q.v. note 8). Ho traveled widely and counted amongst his friends Lin Chao-en (林兆恩 , q.v. note 7) and Lo Ju-fang (羅汝芳), the teacher of T'ang Hsien-tsu (湯顯祖 , q.v. note 31). His political activities provoked resentment however and he died a martyr in prison. For a study of Ho, see R. Dimberg, *The Sage and Society: The Life and Thought of Ho Hsin-yin* (Honolulu, 1974); *Goodrich*, pp. 513-5; *DeBary*, pp. 178-88.

7. Lin Chao-en (林兆恩 , 1517-98) *tzu* Mao-hsün (懋勛), *hao* Lung-chiang (龍江), also Tzu-ku-tzu (子谷子) was born in P'u-t'ien, Fukien into a prominent family. His grandfather had been a follower of Wang Yang-ming's and Lin met the master when very young. He became a licentiate in 1534 but did not advance further. Instead, he devoted his time to a study of the unity between Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. By 1553, he had developed his syncretic approach to the three teachings and began to attract disciples. He subsequently traveled widely in the south, wrote extensively and established a network of Churches of the Three Teachings as well as engaged in border defense against pirates. *Goodrich*, pp. 913-5.

8. The most powerful of the grand secretaries at the beginning of the 17th century was Chang Chü-cheng (張居正 , 1525-82) *tzu* Shu-ta (叔大), *hao* Ta-yueh (大岳) who was born in Chiang-ling, Hupei into a military family. He became a metropolitan graduate in 1547 and entered the Hanlin Academy as a bachelor. There, he became the tutor of the future Wan-li Emperor and rose in the inner council as Vice Minister of Rites. By 1568, he had consolidated his position of leadership in the Grand Secretariat and maintained an autocratic rule by dominating the decadent emperor. He attempted to curb the growth of private academies which were producing many of his opponents. Amongst his positive contributions were in the areas of tax reform, curbing expansion of the bureaucracy and frontier defense. So great was the resentment towards his power, however, that shortly after his death, his vast property was confiscated. Chu Tung-jun (朱東潤), *Chang Chü-cheng ta-chuan* (張居正大傳) (Shanghai, 1945); R. Crawford, "Chang Chü-cheng's Confucian Legalism." In *DeBary*, pp. 367-414; *Goodrich*, pp. 53-61.

9. For studies of these parties, see H. Busch, "The Tung-lin Academy and Its Political and Philosophical Significance" *Monumenta Serica*, XIV (1949-55),

pp. 1-163; Hsieh Kuo-chen (謝國楨), *Ming-Ch'ing chih chi tang-she yun-tung-k'ao* (明清之際黨社運動考) (Taipei, 1967 rpt.); W. Atwell, "From Education to Politics: the Fu-she." In *DeBary*, pp. 333-68.

10. The ideas of such Tung leaders as Ku Hsien-ch'eng (顧憲成) are discussed in Wakeman, "The Price of Autonomy: Intellectuals in Ming and Ch'ing Politics" *Daedalus* (Winter, 1972), pp. 35-70.

11. Li Chih (李贄 , 1517-1602) original *ming* Tsai-chih (載贄), *tzu* Hung-fu (宏父), also Ssu-chai (思齋), *hao* Cho-wu (卓吾), also Wen-ling chü-*shih* (溫陵居士) was born in Chin-chiang, Fukien. A provincial graduate of 1552, he became District Director of Studies in K'ung-ch'eng, Honan in 1555, Doctor of the National University in Nanking in 1559, moving up to the same position in Peking in 1563. Upon return to the capital after a period of mourning in 1566, he became acquainted with the writings of Wang Yang-ming, Wang's disciple Wang Chi (王畿) and Buddhism. From 1571-6 while Vice Director in the Ministry of Justice, he met the Keng brothers. Li was appointed Prefect of Yao-an in 1578 but decided to end his official career in 1581. His first book, *Fen-shu* (焚書) appeared in 1590 containing his major philosophical ideas. This was followed by *Ts'ang-shu* (藏書) in 1600 in which he presented his revision of historical figures. Although he excited much enthusiasm wherever he went, he also aroused opposition and political suspicion leading to his arrest in 1602 whereupon he committed suicide in prison. An avid exponent of popular fiction and drama, he produced commentary editions of *The Western Chamber* (西廂記), *The Lute* (琵琶記), *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (三國演義) and *Water Margin* (水滸傳) amongst other works. E. Cheang, *Li Chih as Critic* (Univ. of Wash. unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, 1973), *Goodrich*, pp. 807-18; *DeBary*, pp. 188-222.

12. Li Cho-wu (李卓吾), "*T'ung-hsin-shuo*" (童心說). In *Li-shih fen-shu* (李氏焚書) (Shanghai, 1936), p. 110.

13. *Meng-tzu* 4B:12: "Mencius said: 'The Great Man is he who has not lost the mind of a new-born babe.' "

14. It is worth noting that a similar shift in the case of Western values has recently been discussed by Lionel Trilling in his lectures, *Sincerity and Authenticity* Cambridge, 1972). In post-renaissance literature, the ideal of sincerity as a balanced congruence between inner feeling and outer avowal has given way to what he defined as "a more exigent conception of the self and what being true to it consists in, a wider reference to the universe and man's place in it, and a less acceptant and genial view of the social circumstances of life." (p. 11)

15. Yuan Hung-tao (袁宏道 , 1568-1610), *tzu* Chung-lang (中郎), also Wu-hsueh (無學), also Liu-hsiu (六休), *hao* Shih-kung (石公), also Shih-t'ou chü-shih (石頭居士) was born in Kung-an, Hupei, the second of three brothers, all of whom achieved literary prominence as central figures in what was called the Kung-an school (公安派). A child prodigy who began his own literary society at the age of 15, he became a metropolitan graduate in 1592 but was uninterested in an official career, a result perhaps of Li Chih's influence for he

had met the latter in Canton. He served as Prefect of Soochow for only a year before resigning, prefering travel and literary activities. He joined his brothers in Peking, becoming an instructor in the National University in 1598 and organized the *P'u-t'ao-she* (蒲桃社) to further their literary views. Yuan continued to hold various offices, returning home periodically. Increasingly, he became interested in Ch'an and Pure Land Buddhism. In addition to his prose and poetry, he produced a novel, *Romance of the Han Dynasty* 東西漢演義). *Goodrich*, 1635-8; the Kung-an school is briefly discussed in Kuo Shao-yü (郭紹虞), *Chung-kuo wen-hsueh p'i-p'ing-shih* (中國文學批評史), vol. 2 (Taipei, 1970 rpt.), pp. 242-283.

16. Lei Ssu-p'ei (雷思霈), "*Hsiao-pi-t'ang-chi hsü*" (瀟碧堂集序). Quoted in Kuo, p. 277.

17. Yuan Hung-tao (袁宏道), "*Chih Chang yu-yü chen-ming-hou*" (識張幼于箴銘後). Quoted in E.C. Cheang, *Li Chih as a Critic* (Univ. of Wash. dissertation, 1973), p. 289.

18. Yuan Hung-tao "*Hsü Hsiao-hsiu shih*" (敍小修詩). In *Yuan Chung-lang ch'uan-chi* (袁中郎全集) (Shanghai, 1935), pp. 5-6.

19. *Tsa-chü* (雜劇) may be defined by a set of formal characteristics: a length of four acts with an optional "wedge" (楔子) act; composition of each act around a set of arias in a fixed series sharing the same rhyme; the hero as played by the *mo* (末) role-type and heroine by the *tan* (旦),; limitation of the singing function to one role in each act. For studies of this genre, see C. W. Shih, *The Golden Age of Chinese Drama* (Princeton, 1976); Yoshikawa Kojiro (吉川幸次郎), *Gen Zatsugeki Kenkyu* (元雜劇研究) (Tokyo, 1948); J. Crump, "The Conventions and Craft of Yuan Drama" *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 91/1 (Jan. - Mar., 1971, pp. 14-29.

20. Four extant records of the earliest professional theatres in China during the 12th to 13th centuries have been collected in *Tung-ching meng-hua-lu wai-ssu-chung* (東京夢華錄外四種) (Shanghai, 1957). The Yuan theatre is discussed in Dolby, *History of Chinese Drama* (London, 1976), pp. 60-70 and *Shih*, pp. 3-20.

21. Wang Shih-fu (王實甫) is said to have flourished during the reign of the Yuan emperor Ch'eng-tsung (1295-1307) in Ta-tu (Peking). He is credited with the first four books of the play, the remaining four acts being ascribed to Kuan Han-ch'ing although this is often disputed. *The Western Chamber* is an unusual play by *tsa-chü* standards. Not only is it five times as long, comprised of twenty acts in all, but it abandons the singing restriction of one role to an act and includes duos and choral combinations. For a study of the evolution of the story, see Wang Chi-ssu (王季思), *Ts'ung Ying-ying-chuan tao Hsi-hsiang-chi* (從鶯鶯傳到西廂記) (Shanghai, 1955); translations exist by H. Hart, *The Western Chamber* (Stanford, 1936) and S. I. Hsiung, *The Romance of the Western Chamber* (New York, 1968 rpt.).

22. See C. T. Hsia, "A Critical Introduction," In *Hsiung*, pp. xxiv-vii.

23. For a recent study of *nan-hsi* (南戲), see T. Zbikowski, *Early Nan-hsi Plays of*

the Southern Sung Dynasty (Warsaw, 1974). It is questionable, however, whether the earliest extant *nan-hsi* texts dating from the early Ming are substantially the same as the content of titles recorded in the Sung. The formal characteristics of *ch'uan-ch'i* (傳奇) have been studied in C. Birch, "Some Concerns and Methods of the Ming Ch'uan-ch'i Drama." In C. Birch, ed., *Studies in Chinese Literary Genres* (Berkeley, 1974) pp. 220-58 and Chang Ching (張敬), *Ming-Ch'ing ch'uan-ch'i tao-lun* (明清傳奇導論) (Taipei, 1961). Among the innovations of *ch'uan-ch'i* was the freedom of any role to sing in an act, variation of rhymes in an aria, combinations of musical modes and aria sets within an act from both northern and southern styles, the use of southern dialects in dialogue, priority to poetic and musical values over theatrical, and a prologue act introducing the plot.

24. Wei Liang-fu (魏良輔 , flourished c. 1550) was born in K'un-shan, Kiangsu, later dwelling in neighboring T'ai-ts'ang. He originally studied the northern style of music but abandoned this in favor of various local styles such as *hai-yen* (海鹽) and *i-yang* (弋陽). After a decade of study, he evolved *k'un-ch'ü* (崑曲) as a synthesis of the best elements of these styles, teaching a number of musicians who became active in the Soochow area. *Ch'ü-lu* (曲律), an early treatise, has been traditionally attributed to Wei. A discussion on Wei and the rise of *k'un-Ch'ü* appears in Ch'ing-mu Cheng-er (青木正兒 , Aoki Masaru), *Chung-kuo chin-shih hsi-ch'ü-shih* (中國近世戲曲史 ; Chinese translation by Wang Chi (Ku)-lu [王吉廬]) (Taipei, 1965 rpt.), pp. 165-78.

25. The superiority of *k'un-ch'ü* lat not only in the beauty of its melodies but in the variety of flourishes, techniques of elaboration as well as the aesthetic restraints caused by breath control. For a discussion and translation of a modern treatise, see R. Strassberg, "The Singing Techniques of *K'un-ch'ü* and Their Musical Notation" *Chinoperl Papers,* No. 6 (1975), pp. 88-121

26. Liang Ch'en-yü (梁辰魚 , c. 1510-82) *tzu* Po-lung (伯龍), *hao* Shao-po (少白), also Ch'ou-ch'ih wai-shih (仇池外史) was born in K'un-shan, Kiangsu into a literati family, his grandfather having served as a local magistrate. Little is known of his life except that he apparently gave up hope of advancing through the examination system, purchasing a title at the National University and made his living by writing and teaching drama. A handsome, romantic figure, he traveled widely and was welcome at the homes of wealthy patrons to whom he taught *k'un-ch'ü*. Liang was said to have directly received Liang's style and was much sought after as a music master; the poet Wang Shih-chen (王世貞) amongst others sought him out. He left a collection of *san-ch'ü* arias, *Chiang-tung po-chu* (江東白苧) and poems, *Yuan-yu-kao* as well as his most famous work, *Huan-sha-chi* (浣紗記 , preface 1577). This play was the first great work to be written in *k'un-ch'ü* and helped to spread the style by its popularity. For a study of Liang and his work, see Chu K'un-kuei, *Liang Ch'en-yü chi ch'i tso-p'in* (梁辰魚及其作品) (Taipei, 1972); *Goodrich*, pp. 893-4.

27. Ku Chi-yuan (顧啓元), *K'o-tso ch'ü-yü* (客座曲語). In Jen Chung-min (任中敏), ed., *Hsin-ch'ü-yuan* (新曲苑) (Taipei, 1971), pp. 166-7.

28. For a study of Mao's anthology, see Chin Meng-hua, *Chi-ku-ko liu-shih-chung-ch'ü hsü-lu* (汲古閣六十種曲敍錄) (Taipei, 1969). It is interesting to note that while otherwise devoted exclusively to *ch'uan-ch'i*, it also contains Wang Shih-fu's *The Western Chamber*. Amongst the technical manuals which appeared at this time were Wei Liang-fu's *Ch'ü-lü* (曲律 , 1616), Wang Chi-te's (王驥德) *Chü-lü* (曲律 , 1610 preface) while critical discussions include Wang Shih-chen's *Ch'ü-ts'ao* (曲藻 , 1580) and Lü T'ien-ch'eng's (呂天成) *Ch'ü-p'in* (曲品 , preface 1610).

29. Chang Tai (張岱), *T'ao-an meng-i* (陶庵夢憶) (Taipei, 1956 rpt.), p. 461.

30. Yü Huai (余懷), *Pan-ch'iao tsa-chi* (板橋雜記). In Chiang Yü-ching (江畬經), ed., *Ch'ing-tai hsiao-shuo pi-chi hsuan* (清代小說筆記選), vol. ' (Taipei, 1972), p. 166.

31. T'ang Hsien-tsu (湯顯祖 , 1550-1616), *tzu* I-jeng (義仍), *hao* Jo-shih (若士), also Hai-jo (海若), also Ch'ing-yuan tao-jen (清遠道人) was born in Lin-ch'uan, Kiangsi. He became a metropolitan graduate in 1583 and served in Nanking, being promoted to secretary in the Ministry of Rites. Due to a critical memorial directed against the grand secretary Shen Shih-hsing (申時行) in 1589, he was demoted to Hsü-wen, Kwangtung. After four years, he was recalled and promoted to district magistrate of Sui-ch'ang, Chekiang but prudently retired in the face of continued opposition. Two years later he was demoted anyway. The remainder of his life was spent on his estate. He declined to become a Confucian teacher with the famous reply, "What everyone lectures on is 'human nature' while I speak only of human emotion." T'ang had a great interest in *tsa-chü* and amassed a fine collection of scripts. In all, he wrote five *ch'uan-ch'i*: *Tz'u-hsiao-chi* (紫簫記), *Tz'u-ch'ai-chi* (紫釵記), *Huan-hun-chi* (還魂記), *Nan-k'o-chi* (南柯記) and *Han-t'an-chi* (邯鄲記), the latter four *being* collected and called *The Four Dreams of Lin-ch'uan* (臨川四夢, *Lin-ch'uan ssu-meng*). Hummel, *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period* (Washington, 1943), pp. 708-9; *Aoki*, pp. 729-48.

32. Also popularly known as *The Peony Pavilion* (牡丹亭 , *Mu-tan-t'ing*). A partial translation appears in C. Birch, *Anthology of Chinese Literature*, Vol. 2 (New York, 1972), pp. 88-126 (incl. scenes 7, 10, 14, 20); for studies of T'ang's dramas, see Hou Wai-lu (侯外廬), *Lun T'ang Hsien-tsu chü-tso ssu-chung* (論湯顯祖劇作四種) (Peking, 1962); Iwaki Hideo (岩城秀夫), *Chugoku gikyoku engeki kenkyu* (中國戲曲演劇研究) (Tokyo, 1973).

33. C. T. Hsia, "Time and the Human Condition in the Plays of T'ang Hsien-tsu." In *DeBary*, pp. 249-90.

34. T'ang Hsien-tsu (湯顯祖), "*Ho-ch'i-hsu*" (合奇序). In Hsu Shuo-fang (徐朔方), ed., *T'ang Hsien-tsu-chi* (湯顯祖集) (Shanghai, 1962), p. 1078.

35. For a brief study of Shen Ching (沈璟) and his followers, see *Aoki*, pp. 211-29 who classifies them under the Wu-chiang school (吳江派 , *wu-chiang-p'ai*).

36. T'ang Hsien-tsu, "*Ta Lü Chiang-shan*" (答呂姜山). In *Hsu*, p. 1337.

37. T'ang Hsien-tsu, "*Mu-tan-t'ing-chi t'i-tz'u*" (牡丹亭記題辭). *Ibid.*, p. 1093.

38. Birch, *Anthology*, p. 97.

39. T'ang Hsien-tsu, "*Mu-tan-t'ing-chi t'i-tz'u*." op. cit.

40. Ibid.

41. Juan Ta-ch'eng (阮大鋮 , c. 1587-1646), *tzu* Chi-chih (集之), *hao* Yuan-hai (圓海), also Shih-ch'iao (石巢), also Po-tzu shan-chiao (百子山樵), was born in Huai-ning, Anhwei into a family of poets and high officials. He became a provincial graduate in 1616 and served in Peking. Although Juan had some connections with Tung-lin activists, he found them opposing him when promotion to an important post came up in favor of their own member, Wei Ta-chung (魏大中). Juan then allied with the faction of Wei Chung-hsien (魏忠賢) and Ts'ui Ch'eng-hsiu (崔呈秀), causing Wei's dismissal. Fear of Tung-lin reprisals caused him to resign his new post and when Wei Chung-hsien fell in 1627, Juan sent in two memorials criticizing both and the activists. Although not an important official himself, he became a particular object of the Tung-lin's wrath when they gained power under the new Ch'ung-chen Emperor. Juan was demoted and returned home. While in retirement, he wrote nine *ch'uan-ch'i* dramas of which four—*Yen-tzu-chien* (燕子箋), *Mou-ni-ho* (牟尼合), *Ch'un-teng-mi* (春燈謎) and *Shuang-chin-pang* (雙金榜) are extant. Druing the 1630's and 40's, when Juan moved to Nanking, he returned to public life through an alliance with Ma Shih-ying (馬士英), this despite activist attempts to discredit him through the Nanking Manifesto of 1639. With the fall of Peking, loyalist elements gathered in Nanking to support the Restoration Court under Prince Fu. Both Juan and Ma gained control of the court and proceeded to purge their opponents. With the fall of Nanking, Juan surrendered to the Manchus and became a military advisor, aiding them in their Fukien campaign where he died. R. Crawford, "The Biography of Juan Ta-ch'eng" *Chinese Culture* 6 (March, 1965), pp. 28-205; *Hummel*, pp. 398-9.

42. *Chang*, p. 111.

43. According to a preface dated 1642 by Wei-p'ei chü-shih (韋佩居士), it is the sixth of Juan Ta-ch'eng's (阮大鋮) plays, all of which were written during the seventeen years of his retirement from office. Another critic, Meng-feng (夢鳳), states in an epilogue that there was a *p'ing-hua* (平話) narrative in 18 chapters with substantially the same plot as Juan's play and textually identical with some of the dialogue and poetry. Based on the paper quality, Meng-feng estimated the story's printing in the early Ming, suggesting that Juan's play was based on it, *The Swallow Note* became the most popular of Juan's works and was a favorite of Prince Fu, the Hung-kuang Emperor of the Nanking Restoration who had the famous calligrapher Wang To (王鐸) write out the palace version. *Aoki*, pp. 305-7.

44. Li Yü (李漁 , 1611-80?), *tzu* Li-weng (笠翁), *hao* Ti-fan (謫凡), also Li-tao-jen (笠道人), also Sui-an chu-jen (隨菴主人), was born in Hsia-chih, Hupei into a literati family that had suffered financial reverses. He earned his licentiate degree around 1635 and attained note as an essay writer; however, he did not succeed further in the examinations and abandoned hope of an official career, withdrawing to the countryside as the Ming collapsed. He found refuge

with a loyalist prefect in Chin-hua, Chekiang but had to flee when the city was attacked by the invading Manchus in 1646. (Interestingly, the dramatist Juan Ta-ch'eng was on the other side, aiding the Manchus in their attack.) Li moved to Hangchow in 1647 and began his career as a professional writer. His dramas gained him notoriety and he moved in high circles amongst famous writers and high Ch'ing officials. Ten years later, he moved to Nanking where he continued to associate with such leading lights as Yu T'ung (尤侗), Yü Huai (余懷), Wu Wei-yeh (吳偉業) and Wang Shih-chen (王士禎). During this period, he founded the Mustard Seed Garden, a bookstore and publishing house near his mansion noted for the painting manual which it printed in 1679. Although Li lived graciously, he was constantly in debt and raised funds by tours of his large household troupe. A number of his concubines belonged to it and they performed his plays in such distant places as Kansu and Peking. He moved back to Hangchow in 1677 and died there about three years later. Li was a prolific writer leaving ten *ch'uan-ch'i*. He also produced two short story collections, *Wu-sheng-hsi* (無聲戲 , c. 1657) and *Shih-er-lou* (十二樓 , 1658 preface), a novel whose attribution is sometimes questioned, *Jou-p'u-t'uan* (肉蒲團 , 1633 edition) and another, *Hui-wen-chuan* (迴文傳), a poetry collection, *Li-weng i-chia-yen* (笠翁一家言 , 1673) and a miscellany, *Hsien-ch'ing ou-chi* (閒情偶寄 , 1673) which contains his drama criticism. N. Mao & T.Y. Liu, *Li Yü* (Boston, 1977); H. Martin, *Li Li-weng Über Das Theater* (Taipei, 1968); *Hummel*, pp. 495-7.

45. Li Yü, *Hsien-ch'ing ou-chi*. In *Chung-kuo ku-tien hsi-ch'ü lun-chu chi-ch'eng* (中國古典戲曲論著集成) (Peking, 1959), vol. 7, pp. 14.
46. See Li's essay "*Pin-pai*" (賓白). *Ibid.*, pp. 51-2.
47. This is apparently the view of the Ch'ien-lung critic Yeh T'ang (葉堂) in his *Na-shu-ying ch'ü-p'u* (納書楹曲譜). Yeh traced what he considered to be Li's cleverness to the influence of Juan Ta-ch'eng. Quoted in *Aoki*, p. 308.
48. For a study of the nature of Manchu-Chinese relationships in the early Ch'ing, see J. Spence, *Ts'ao Yin and the K'ang-hsi Emperor* (New Haven, 1966).
49. See Huang Tsung-hsi's (黃宗羲) *Ming-ju hsueh-an* (明儒學案) for this viewpoint.
50. The School of Empirical Studies is discussed briefly in Liang Ch'i-ch'ao, *Intellectual Trends of the Ch'ing Period*. Translated by I. Hsu. (Cambridge, 1970).
51. K'ung Shang-jen (孔尚任 , 1648-1718), *tzu* P'in-chih (聘之), also Chi-chung (季重), *hao* Tung-t'ang (東塘), also An-t'ang (岸堂), also Yun-t'ing shan-jen (云亭山人), was born in Ch'ü-fu, Shantung into the 64th generation of descent from Confucius. He earned the licentiate degree before he was twenty-two but advanced no further in the examination system. After fruitless attempts to start an academy, he retired to a nearby mountain for a year of study in retreat, only to be summoned by the head of the K'ung clan to engage in clan affairs. In addition to compiling a genealogy, he trained students in ancient Chou ritual forms. The following year, 1684, the K'ang-hsi Emperor

visited Ch'ü-fu. K'ung attracted his attention by lecturing to him on the classics and was appointed a doctor in the National University in Peking. From 1685-9, he went south to join in the river control project around the Yangchow area. In addition to gaining notice as a poet, he met many survivors of the Ming period and traveled to numerous historic sights in the Yangtze area. Upon returning to Peking, he began his major work, *T'ao-hua-shan* (桃花扇) which was completed in 1699 and was well received. K'ung retired from office in 1701 due to a political affair, after having risen to secretary in the Ministry of Revenue. The remaining years were spent in travel and he died back in Ch'ü-fu at the age of 70. K'ung wrote a set of arias, *Hsiao-hu-lei* (小忽雷) and another play, *Ta-hu-lei* (大忽雷) in 1694, aided by the musician Ku Ts'ai (顧彩), who also advised him on *k'un-ch'ü* in connection with his later masterpiece. In addition, he published a number of poetry collections including *Hu-hai-chi* (湖海集 , 1689 preface) containing the poems of his Yangchow years. Another well-known work of his, *Ch'u-shan i-shu-chi* (出山異數記 , 1685) records his experience during the K'ang-hsi Emperor's visit. R. Strassberg, *The Peach Blossom Fan: Personal Cultivation in a Chinese Drama* (Princeton: unpub. Ph.D. dissertation, 1975); "K'ung Shang-jen and the K'ang-hsi Emperor" *Ch'ing-shih wen-t'i* (清史問題 , forthcoming); Chen Wan-nai (陳萬鼐), *K'ung Tung-t'ang hsien-sheng nien-p'u* (孔東塘先生年譜) (Taipei, 1973); *Hummel*, pp. 434-5.

52. K'ung Shang-jen, "*Tao-hua-shan hsiao-yin*" (桃花扇小引). In Wang Chi-ssu, ed., *Tao-hua-shan* (Peking, 1959), p. 1.

53. These prefaces are reprinted in *Wang*, pp. 3-25.

54. For a translation of this scene, see K'ung Shang-jen, *The Peach Blossom Fan: Scene 4* (translated by R. Strassberg) *Renditions*, 8 (Autumn, 1977), pp. 115-22.

55. For a study of Liu see Hung Shih-liang (洪式良), *Liu Ching-t'ing p'ing-chuan* (柳敬亭評傳) (Shanghai, 1956).