PART ONE

A STUDY OF *TOU O YÜAN*

The play, *Injustice to Tou O* (*Tou O Yüan* 竇娥冤) by Kuan Han-ch'ing 關漢卿, written in the thirteenth century, has remained a popular favorite in its many different versions through the ages. It is still presented in the Peking opera theatres under the title *Snow in Midsummer* (*Liu-yüeh hsüeh* 六月雪). Several editions of the original Yüan play have come from The People's Republic of China in recent years. Thus, despite turbulent political and social changes, the play continues to be appealing, because it represents ideas strong and persistent among the Chinese.

Yüan drama is a well-defined genre, derived from a long tradition of stylization, with a consistent structure and a formal pattern carefully observed by the playwrights. The Chinese stage has inherited from Yüan drama many of its techniques, conventions, plots, and themes. A clear understanding of one Yüan play can thus add considerably to our knowledge of the genre and its relation to later Chinese drama.

Kuan Han-ch'ing and his time

Yüan drama, like many other great literary achievements, profited, no doubt, by the coincidence of men and the moment. The sudden blossoming of the drama during the Yüan dynasty was largely due to the political climate which, though adverse to the Chinese people, was favorable for the development of this new literary genre. Civil service examinations for the selection of officials were suspended in the north in 1237, soon after the conquest of the Chin 金 by the Mongols, and in the south in 1274 just before the fall of the Sung; and they were not to be reinstated until 1315. The seventy-eight year suspension of this institution in China deprived scholars of the traditional road to government service and frustrated their hopes for success and glory. Barred from officialdom, the *literati* experienced financial difficulties and a drastic change of social position. The practical need to make a living and the psychological need to win prestige and fame thus attracted some of them to play writing.

Their attempts in the theatre found support among both the rulers and the Chinese people. The Mongols, generally unappreciative of classical Chinese writing, easily found enjoyment in the acted stories with their singing and dancing. The Chinese audience found further reward in a theatre which provided an outlet for their frustrations and an easy flight into fantasy. Two overlapping lists of Yüan plays, one by a contemporary author, containing 452 titles,[1] and one by an early Ming writer, of 535 titles,[2] indicate the popularity of Yüan drama. While the collective energy of the *literati* helped to gain this popularity for drama during the Yüan dynasty, the creative genius of a few poets like Kuan Han-ch'ing, Ma Chih-yüan 馬致遠, Cheng Kuang-tsu 鄭光祖, Po P'u 白樸, and Wang Shih-fu 王實甫 also established the genre as a brilliant and unique achievement in Chinese literary history.

Kuan Han-ch'ing is listed first among the playwrights in *A Register of Ghosts*, a contemporary record of Yüan poets and dramatists, published in 1330. There he is said to be 'a native of Ta-tu' (大都, present-day Peking); he is styled as 'old man of the Yi Study' (*Yi-chai sou* 已齋叟), and a member of the Academy of Imperial Medical Affairs (*T'ai-yi yüan yin* 太醫院尹).[3] The dates of his birth and death are a matter of controversy. He is mentioned in *A Register* as a contemporary of Po P'u, who lived from 1226 to 1285 and whose birthdate is the only one of the Yüan dramatists to be known with certainty. Kuan Han-ch'ing was probably born just a few years before Po P'u, and he must have died before 1330, as he was listed among the deceased in *A Register of Ghosts*.[4]

The range of Kuan Han-ch'ing's subjects is wide. He wrote sixty-

1 *A Register of Ghosts* (*Lu-kuei pu* 錄鬼簿), by Chung Ssu-ch'eng 鍾嗣成, 1330. A critical edition 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. II, pp. 105–37.

2 *A Register of the Sounds of Universal Harmony* (*T'ai-ho cheng-yin p'u* 太和正音譜) by Prince Chu Ch'üan 朱權 of the early fifteenth century, lists about 500 titles (allegedly 535 titles, but only 418 in extant editions). In *Chung-kuo ku-tien hsi-ch'ü lun-chu chi-ch'eng*, (Peking, 1959), vol. III, pp. 26–43.

3 *A Register of Ghosts*, p. 104.

4 For information on Kuan Han-ch'ing's life, see T'an Cheng-pi 譚正璧, *Short Biographies of Six Yüan Master Playwrights* (*Yüan ch'ü liu ta-chia lüeh chuan* 元曲六大家畧傳), (Shanghai, 1955), pp. 4–118; *A Collection of Essays on Kuan Han-ch'ing* (*Kuan Han-ch'ing yen-chiu lun-wen chi* 關漢卿研究論文集) ed. Ku-tien wen hsüeh ch'u-pan-she, 1958, pp. 11–46; and J. P. Seaton, Jr., 'A Critical Study of Kuan Han-ch'ing: The Man and His Works', an unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, (Indiana University, 1969), pp. 227-32.

three plays, of which eighteen are extant.[1] Eight of these have recently been translated into English: *Injustice to Tou O*, *The Butterfly Dream* (*Hu-tieh meng* 蝴蝶夢), and *The Wife-snatcher* (*Lu chai lang* 魯齋郎) deal with trials and justice; *Rescued by a Coquette* (*Chiu feng-ch'en* 救風塵), *The Jade Mirror-stand* (*Yü ching-t'ai* 玉鏡臺) and *The Riverside Pavilion* (*Wang-chiang t'ing* 望江亭) are comedies dealing with courtship and marriage; *Lord Kuan Goes to the Feast* (*Tan tao hui* 單刀會) and *Death of the Winged-tiger General* (*K'u Ts'un-hsiao* 哭存孝) celebrate historical incidents.[2] He shows in these plays that he was adept at writing tragedy as well as comedy and satire.

He is known to have 'appeared on the stage himself, with his face painted black and white, considering this his profession, and having no objection to the company of actors'.[3] His experience as an actor, living on intimate terms with other actors, and his attention to the requirements of the actors, the stage, and the audience, must have contributed to his understanding of the theatre and to his progress in dramatic technique. Chia Chung-ming 賈仲明, an early Ming dynasty writer, calls Kuan Han-ch'ing in an elegy 'the leader of the theatre, the master of the *tsa-chü* performing team' (*li-yüan ling-hsiu*, . . . *tsa-chü pan t'ou* 梨園領袖 . . . 雜劇班頭).[4]

The narrative tradition and the play's source

Yüan Northern drama, usually called the *tsa-chü* ('variety play'), acquired this generic name from earlier plays of quite a different nature. It consists of acting, dialogue, singing, dancing, and music. Whereas earlier theatricals enriched the format of the Yüan stage, the *pien-wen* 變文 (originally popularized versions of Buddhist scriptures) and the *ch'uan-ch'i* 傳奇 ('tales of the marvelous') of the T'ang 唐, and the oral story-telling of the Sung 宋 times, had the greatest bearing on the emergence of the Yüan dramatic literature. The *pien-wen*, with its earthy and colloquial language, ushered in the possibility of telling a long, continuous story through songs and prose dialogue. The *ch'uan-ch'i*, with amazing skill in narrative art and insight into human

1 See 'A Complete List of Kuan Han-ch'ing's Plays' ('Kuan Han-ch'ing tsa-chü ch'üan-mu' 關漢卿雜劇全目) and postscript in *A Collection of Kuan Han-ch'ing's Plays* (*Kuan Han-ch'ing hsi-ch'ü chi* 關漢卿戲曲集), pp. 1003–52 and 1053–70.

2 Hsien-yi Yang and Gladys Yang, trans., *Selected Plays of Kuan Han-ch'ing*, (Peking, 1958).

3 Tsang Chin-shu 臧晉叔, 'Preface', *Selected Yüan Plays* (*Yüan-ch'ü hsüan* 元曲選), 1616, vol. 1, pp. 1*a–b*.

4 *A Register of Ghosts*, note 130, p. 151.

psychology, aroused great interest in stories about people, rather than spirits, which dominate the pre-T'ang tales. In addition to these, the 'medley' (*chu-kung tiao* 諸宮調) type of oral narrative, current in the Sung and Chin period, was a major shaping force for the Yüan plays.

The urgent needs of the theatre encouraged the playwrights to turn to a variety of source materials – oral narratives, literary tales, or histories. By the time the story was appropriated by the Yüan dramatist, the original tale had often gone through several versions and had proven its value as popular entertainment. An example of this course of development is the famous story of Ying-ying 鶯鶯, which originated in T'ang *ch'uan-ch'i*, developed through several versions of Sung and Chin oral narratives, and was finally celebrated in the outstanding Yüan play, *The Romance of the Western Chamber* (*Hsi hsiang chi* 西廂記).[1]

The basic story in *Injustice to Tou O*, of a filial woman of Tung-hai 東海, is from the *History of Han* (*Han-shu* 漢書) and from an expanded version of the story in the *Records of Spirits* (*Sou shen chi* 搜神記) of the fourth century. The biography of Yü Ting-kuo 于定國 in the *History* reads as follows:

> In Tung-hai there was a filial woman who became a widow at a young age and then also lost her son. She diligently served her mother-in-law, who wanted her to remarry, but she refused. Her mother-in-law told the neighbors, 'My daughter-in-law serves me diligently. I pity her for losing her son in her widowhood. I am old and am such a burden to a young person. What shall I do?' Later the mother-in-law strangled herself. Her daughter went to the officials, saying, 'The woman killed my mother!' The magistrate arrested the filial woman, but she denied the charge of murdering her mother-in-law. The magistrate cross-examined her, and she confessed under severe pressure. Lord Yü [the father of Yü Ting-kuo, and at the time an officer in charge of prisons] believed that this woman, who in serving her mother-in-law for more than ten years was known for her filial piety, could not have been a murderer. The prefect refused to listen. Failing to win his case, Lord Yü, holding the case

[1] The T'ang story entitled 'An Account of Meeting an Immortal' (*Hui chen chi* 會眞記), also known as 'The Story of Ying-ying' (*Ying -ying chuan* 鶯鶯傳), is by Yüan Chen 元稹 (779–831). Three versions of the Sung oral narratives have survived: 'The Flirtation Song Turns' (*T'iao-hsiao ling chuan-t'a* 調笑令轉踏) by Ch'in Kuan 秦觀 (1049–1101); 'A Drum Song of an Account of Meeting an Immortal' (*Hui chen chi ku-tzu tz'u* 會眞記鼓子詞) by Chao Ling-chih 趙令畤 (*ca.* 1110); a prose-song version known as 'Shang mode: The Butterfly in Love with Flowers' (*Shang tiao Tieh lien hua* 商調蝶戀花). Tung Chieh-yüan's 董解元 *The Western Chamber Medley* (*Hsi hsiang chi chu-kung-tiao* 西廂記諸宮調), a narrative consisting of prose and verse, is the most significant shaping force of the Yüan play and its immediate source.

> records in his hands, wept at the hall of the prefecture and finally resigned on the excuse of sickness. The prefect, after all, executed the filial woman. A severe drought lasted for three years in the prefecture. Later when a new prefect arrived, he tried to find the reason by divination for this disaster. Lord Yü said: 'The former prefect dealt the sentence; could this be the cause of the disaster?' Then the prefect slaughtered an ox, personally offered sacrifice at the filial woman's home, and offered praise in front of the grave. Immediately there was a great rainfall, followed by a good yield in the harvest.[1]

The version in *Records of Spirits* is the same as in the *History* except for the following appended statement:

> It is stated in the biography of the elderly man: 'The filial woman's name was Chou Ch'ing 周青. When Ch'ing was about to die, she had carried in a carriage a one hundred-foot long bamboo pole from which to hang five streamers, and she made a vow in front of the people: "If I am guilty, and deserve to be executed, my blood should flow down; if I die unjustly, my blood shall flow in the opposite direction." After she was executed, her blood, of a dark yellow color, poured upward along the bamboo pole, reaching the streamers, and then flowed down again.'[2]

The incident of a snowfall in midsummer is derived from a story in *Huai-nan tzu* 淮南子, a collection of Taoist writings compiled under the patronage of Liu An 劉安, the talented prince of Huai-nan, of the second century B.C.: 'Tsou Yen 鄒衍, in the service of King Hui 惠 of the state of Yen 燕, was extremely loyal. However, the people around the king slandered him, and he was imprisoned. Looking up to Heaven, he cried bitterly. It was the summer season in the fifth month, yet Heaven sent down frost for his sake.'[3]

Conventions of Yüan drama

Whereas the borrowing of actual stories and thematic material from the oral narratives is obvious, the survival in drama of structural devices and conventions of the oral tradition is also significant. By Yüan times, oral story telling was an established institution with proven value as popular entertainment; it is only natural that the dramatists exploited the possibilities inherent in the conventions of the oral performance. The opening verse, self-identification, direct and lyrical expression, recapitulation, alternate use of verse and prose,

1 *History of Han* (*Han-shu* 漢書, *Po-na ed.*), *chüan* 71, p.p. 5*b*–6*a*.
2 Kan Pao 干寶, *Records of Spirits* (*Sou shen chi* 搜神記), (Shih-chien Book Co., 1959), *chüan* 11, p. 84.
3 Quoted in *The Imperial Encyclopedia* (*T'ai-p'ing yü lan* 太平御覽, *SPTK san-pien*), *chüan* 14, p. 2*b*.

restriction to one singing role, and the sequential presentation of stories, are apparently all formal legacies from oral story telling. The Yüan dramatists adopted these features partly because of tradition, and partly because of their inherent theatrical value.

Yüan drama, as a well-defined genre, was heir to a complex artistic tradition composed of many strands: fascination with story telling, delight in poetry, concern for music, and interest in acting and acrobatics. A convention in Yüan drama which seems to have come from the four-part 'variety play' (*tsa-chü*) of the Sung dynasty is the four-act (*che* 折) division. However, there is often placed in the beginning of a play or between two acts a *hsieh-tzu* 楔子, commonly translated as the 'wedge' (see p. 37, n. 3 below); this mobile unit, in some ways comparable to a prologue or an interlude in Western plays, adds great variety to the otherwise rigid four-act structure.

Another interesting convention of Yüan drama is the role system, which is reminiscent of the now almost extinct 'stock company' that prevailed in many eastern American towns and cities in the early nineteenth century. Professional actors and actresses, belonging to a resident dramatic group, were designated by the type of roles they habitually played, such as 'the leading woman', 'the leading man', 'old gentleman', 'ingenue', 'comedian', or 'juvenile'. In the Yüan plays, although no description of the *dramatis personae* is given, mention is always made of the proper role of each character. In the Prologue in *Injustice to Tou O*, for instance, upon the entrance of Tou O and her father, it is stated: 'the supporting actor impersonating Tou T'ien-chang, guiding the female lead impersonating Tuan-yün, enters' (ll. 24–6).

In each play, there is one leading male or female role, who does all the singing in the four acts, whereas singing in the 'wedge' (*hsieh-tzu*) may be performed by other roles. Among the male roles are *cheng mo* 正末, the principal male-role; *fu mo* 副末, or *ch'ung mo* 冲末, a supporting male role; *po-lao* 孛老, an old man (here as the part of Donkey Chang's father); and *hsiao mo* 小末, a youth. Among the female roles are *cheng tan* 正旦, the principal female role (here as the part of Tou O); *pu-er* 卜兒, an old woman (here as the part of Mistress Ts'ai); *hun-tan* 魂旦, a female ghost (here as the part of Tou O's ghost). Other roles are *ching* 净, usually a villainous person (here as the part of Dr Lu and also as the prefect T'ao Wu); *fu-ching* 副净, a secondary villainous person (here as the part of Donkey Chang); *wai* 外, usually a serious person (here as the part of the execution officer and also of the prefect who succeeded T'ao Wu); *ch'ou* 丑, a

clownish person (here as the part of the servant Chang Ch'ien and the guard). Although one actor in a certain role generally plays the part of one character in a play, he can play the parts of two or more, as the *wai* and *ching* roles in this play demonstrate. Although the two *ching* roles here could be played by two different actors, it is probable, since they never meet on stage, that the two characters Dr Lu and Prefect T'ao are played by one *ching* actor. The role system seems to make the minor characters, such as servants and officials, types instead of individuals; however, in the hands of master playwrights like Kuan Han-ch'ing, the protagonists are remarkably alive and interesting.

The role system has persisted in the Chinese classical theatre, where an evening's program often consists of a number of different episodes from a variety of plays, providing an opportunity for the individual actors and actresses to demonstrate the roles in which they excel.

Yüan Northern dialect

Colloquial speech in the Yüan plays is identified with the Northern, rather than the Southern dialect. Since in the beginning the performances centered around Ta-tu, and the playwrights were predominantly from the northern region, it is natural to assume that the speech and its delivery on stage were current with that of the capital and its adjacent area.

Chou Te-ch'ing 周德清, the authoritative Yüan scholar on *ch'ü* 曲, asserts that in writing *ch'ü*, 'one must use the correct language; and in the choice of correct language, one must follow the sounds of the Central Plains', and he adds that the perfection of *ch'ü* 'comes with the new creations of Kuan, Cheng, Po, and Ma, whose rhymes all preserve the natural sounds and whose words are those of the universal language'.[1] Of these four master *ch'ü* writers, Kuan Han-ch'ing and Ma Chih-yüan were from Ta-tu, Cheng Kuang-tsu was from P'ing-yang 平陽, Shansi 山西, and Po P'u from Chen-ting 眞定, Hopei 河北, all in North China. Chou Te-ch'ing's statements make it clear that the work of these poets was written in the spoken language of the Yüan period in North China, a language easily understood by a large number of people in China. Historical linguistic evidence also supports the belief that the sound and rhyme system used in the Yüan plays is that of a Mandarin dialect.[2] The third and clearest piece of evidence

1 Chou Te-ch'ing 周德清, *Chung-yüan yin-yün* 中原音韻, 1324. In *Chung-kuo ku-tien hsi-ch'ü lun-chu chi-ch'eng*, (Peking, 1959), vol. I, p. 175.

2 Hugh M. Stimson, 'Phonology of the *Chung-yüan yin yün*', *Tsing Hua Journal of Chinese Studies, New Series*, III (1962), 147.

showing the affinity of Yüan dramatic prose to the Northern dialect lies in the texts of the plays themselves. Except for some occasional expressions, the prose speech is very similar to the Northern speech of today.

On the phonetics of Yüan Northern dialect, known as Old Mandarin or Ancient Mandarin, there exists today, fortunately, Chou Te-ch'ing's *Sound and Rhymes in the Central Plains* (*Chung-yüan yin yün*, hereafter referred to as *CYYY*). With a preface dated 1324 and published at the height of the popularity of Yüan drama, this is essentially a handbook on versification for writers of the *ch'ü*. It consists of two sections: part one is primarily a listing of the rhymes and their homonyms; part two, entitled 'Beginner's models in the composition of *tz'u* according to the standard pronunciation of the CYYY' (*CYYY cheng-yü tso-tz'u ch'i-li* 中原音韻正語作詞起例), contains many statements about the sounds and rhymes of the language of the Yüan drama.

1. *The initials*. An analysis of the *CYYY* by Chao Yin-t'ang 趙蔭棠 yields twenty-one initials;[1] Tung T'ung-ho 董同龢, however, questions the existence of the inital 'ŋ' and believes that there might have been only twenty initials. The following chart by Tung of Old Mandarin initials with inclusion of Chinese characters makes easily discernible the difference in pronunciation of the initials of certain characters in Old Mandarin and modern Mandarin:[2]

p (班 辦)	p' (盤 判)	m (慢)	f (反 飯)	v (晚)
t (丹 但)	t' (壇 歎)	n (難)		l (闌)
ts (贊 尖)	ts' (殘 鑾 錢)		s (珊 先)	
tʃ (展 棧)	tʃ' (廛)		ʃ (山)	ʒ (然)
k (干 堅)	k' (看 牽)	(ŋ)	x (漢 現)	
O [zero] (安 顏 鸞 元)				

[1] Chao Yin-t'ang, *Chung-yüan yin yün yen-chiu* 中原音韻研究, (Shanghai, 1936), pp. 62–3.
[2] Tung T'ung-ho, *Chung-kuo yü-yin shih* 中國語音史, (Taipei, 1954), p. 24.

The most obvious difference is that Old Mandarin initials 'ts', 'ts' ' and 's', and 'k', 'k' ' and 'x' before the vowel 'i' are, with few exceptions, palatalized in modern Mandarin, as illustrated in the following characters:

Old Mandarin (transcription according to Tung's system)	*Modern Mandarin* (transcription according to Wade-Giles system)
尖 tsiem	chien
錢 ts'ien	ch'ien
先 sien	hsien
堅 kien	chien
牽 k'ien	ch'ien
現 xien	hsien
居 kiu	chü
去 k'iu	ch'ü
虛 xiu	hsü

No such palatalization occurs before other vowels; thus the initials before the vowel 'a' in *tsan* 贊, *ts'an* 殘, *san* 珊, and *kan* 干, *k'an* 看, *han* 漢, for example, are the same in Old Mandarin and modern Mandarin.

2. *The finals.* In the *CYYY*, the syllables, classified according to the finals in the Northern dialect, fall into nineteen rhyme groups. They appear in the original order as follows; the pronunciation is Tung T'ung-ho's reconstruction:[1]

(1) 東鍾 uŋ, iuŋ
(2) 江陽 aŋ, iaŋ, uaŋ
(3) 支思 ī
(4) 齊微 i, iei, uei
(5) 魚模 u, iu
(6) 皆來 ai, iai, uai
(7) 眞文 ən. iən, uən, yən
(8) 寒山 an, ian, uan
(9) 桓歡 on
(10) 先天 ien, yen
(11) 蕭豪 au, au, iau, (uau)
(12) 歌戈 o, io, uo
(13) 家麻 a, (ia), ua
(14) 車遮 ie, ye
(15) 庚青 əŋ, iəŋ, uəŋ, yəŋ,
(16) 尤侯 ou, iou
(17) 侵尋 əm, iəm
(18) 監咸 am, iam
(19) 廉纖 iem

Some of the striking differences of finals between Old Mandarin and modern Mandarin may be summarized as follows:[2]

Old Mandarin (Tung's system)	*Modern Mandarin* (Wade-Giles)	*Conditions*	*Examples*
–uŋ	–eng	after p–, p'–, m–, f–	崩 烹 夢 風

1 Tung T'ung-ho, *Chung-kuo yü-yin shih*, pp. 27–34.
2 See *ibid.*, pp. 27–34 for details.

–iuŋ	–ung	after n–, l–; ts–, ts', s–	膿 籠 宗 叢 鬆
–uei	–ei	after n–, l–	內 淚
–iən	–en	after tʃ–, tʃ'–, ʃ–, ʒ–	眞 陳 神 人
–on	–an	after p–, p', m–	搬 判 滿
–on	–uan	after t–, t'–, n–, l–; ts–, ts'–, s–; k–, k'–, x–; o–	端 團 煖 亂 鑽 攢 酸 官 寬 歡 玩
–ien	–an	after tʃ–, tʃ'–, ʃ–, ʒ–	展 廛 扇 然
–iəŋ	–eng	after tʃ–, tʃ'–, ʃ–, ʒ–	正 稱 聲 仍
–iou	–ou	after tʃ–, tʃ'–, ʃ–, ʒ–	晝 丑 受 肉
–m	–n	in all cases	

3. *The tones.* In Ancient Chinese, there are four tones: *p'ing* 平 or 'level', *shang* 上 or 'rising', *ch'ü* 去 or 'falling', and *ju* 入 or 'entering'. Chou Te-ch'ing further distinguishes the *p'ing* tone into two groups: the *yin-p'ing* 陰 平 and *yang-p'ing* 陽 平. The *ju* tone does not exist in *ch'ü* prosody. In the rhyme book section in *CYYY* the erstwhile *ju*-tone graphs are re-distributed into the other tone groups, but set apart in separate listings. In all, there are three main tone groups with the possible subdivision as follows:

p'ing: *yin-p'ing*
yang-p'ing
ju tone as *p'ing* tone
ch'ü tone as *p'ing* tone
shang: *shang*
ju tone as *shang* tone
ch'ü: *ch'ü*
ju tone as *ch'ü* tone

Whether *ju* tone existed in the *CYYY* dialect in the Yüan period has remained a controversial question. Chou Te-ch'ing states in the very beginning of his discourse on the composition of *ch'ü* that '*ju* tone has been assigned to the three tones, *p'ing*, *shang*, and *ch'ü*, merely for the convenience of rhyming when composing *tz'u* 詞. In actual speech, however, the distinction of the *ju* tone still exists.'[1]

1 Chou Te-ch'ing, *Chung-yüan yin-yün*, p. 211.