

NOTES ON CHIUCHOW OPERA (潮劇)

HELGA WERLE

Ms. Helga Werle, whose article on Chiuchow (in Mandarin Chao-chow) puppets appeared in the 1973 Journal, describes two typical plays of the Chiuchow opera, and gives background information about this particular regional theatre of China. Ed.

In urbanized Hong Kong today one can see a performance of Chiuchow Opera at City Hall or Lee theatre two or three times a year, but the traditional purpose of this opera is the *shen-kung hsi* 神功戲 a performance to celebrate the birthday of a deity. Many areas of Hong Kong have their organized Chiuchow communities centred upon the temple of a certain deity.

The Chiuchows have innumerable deities, often completely different from the Cantonese. Some of those worshipped in Hong Kong with temples erected in their names are:

Li-shan lao-mu 梨山老母

T'ai-i chen-ren 太乙真人

Li lao-ch'ün 李老君

Ch'i t'in ta-sheng 齊天大聖

San-shan kuo-wang 三山國王

San t'ai-tze lao-yeh 三太子老爺

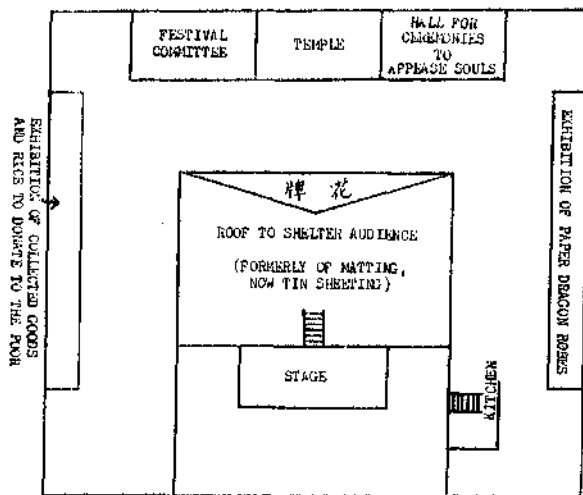
Mu-ch'a 木咤 Chin-ch'a 金咤 and No-ch'a 哪咤 called the three princes "san t'ai-tze" 三太子, the three sons of Li Ching 李靖.

Han Chung-kung 韓忠公

To ensure the prosperity of each temple community the birthday of its deity must be properly celebrated. The most outstanding members of the community are chosen to form the prestigious festival committee, which has the duty to collect the necessary amount of money (between 50 and 100,000 HK\$) to organize a worthy celebration. And what could rejoice a god's heart more than the luxury of a series of opera performances? After the dates are decided with the consent of the deity involved a large space is booked with a Government office (usually a public playground),

Plates 5-12 at rear of the volume illustrate this article.

and then a company is contracted to erect the temporary bamboo structures to house performances and ceremonies. The ideal is for the structures to be arranged in a square, the temple facing East and the stage opposite (i.e. West), so that the god is conveniently positioned to get the best view of the stage. The organizers are housed on one or both sides of the temple and on the sides of the square are exhibited the giant-sized dragon-ropes, crowns and boots, all elaborately made of paper, which will be burnt and, in this way, sent as a birthday present to the god.



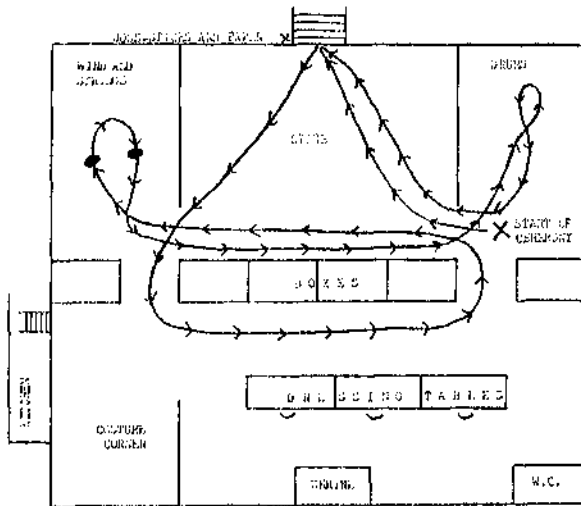
Chiuchow festival square (the layout is almost the same whether it is used for the celebration of god's birthdays pao-tan 寶誕 or for the appeasement of the hungry souls in the 7th month called Yü-lan-p'ên 盂蘭盆).

The interior of the temporary temple is almost completely occupied by a large square table (about 4m × 4m) on which items donated by individuals of the community are displayed before they are auctioned off. Holding a microphone and a gong several auctioneers stand on a table in front of the temple and, competing with the loudspeakers amplifying the opera music, they promise prosperity and good fortune (in the traditional 4-character phrases) to the highest bidder. Bottles of brandy and whiskey, porcelain figures of immortals and deities, and colourful lamps and lanterns go for several hundred or thousands of dollars at a time. Although the successful bidder can take his acquisition home he does not pay the bid until the following festival. And especially if he is poor at the time, he

NOTES ON CHIUCHOW OPERA

may later increase his bid to several thousands of dollars, because the people are convinced that a god who is powerful (for whom it is worthwhile to give such a lavish celebration) will ensure the bidder good fortune so that he can pay his debt the next year. And because many people become rich in this way it is possible to collect the large sums of money necessary to cover the cost of these on-going festivals.

The community proves its wealth by inviting, if it can, the best and most costly operatic troupe. This is now the Sang Ngai Chiu-chow Opera troupe 昇藝潮劇團 (founded in 1965) which charges a fee of up to 20,000 HK\$ per evening. The troupe consists of about 80 members, which include 20 musicians, 40 actors, stage-hands, a costume-keeper, hair-dresser, art-director, designer, manager, coolies and a cook.



The Chiu-chow Opera stage and 'p'o-l'an' ceremony.

The size of the stage depends on circumstances and forms a square, including its backstage which is only accessible by climbing up a ladder where the troupe's kitchen is. On the morning of the first performance the coolies carry the 20-40 big wooden trunks on a bamboo pole up the ladder and then they are all put in their right position backstage. Those with the musical instruments go left and right of stage; those with hats and small props are lined up at the

back of the stage (military and civil hats should be separated, so that those who wear them will not fight with each other!). The costumes are all taken to the left back corner and the other trunks which contain the dressing-tables of the lead-actors (one character of their name is painted on the trunk) are placed wherever space is left. There is one old man in charge to look after the patron-deity of the troupe. He will place the shrine in the middle of the back-stage against the back-wall. The rolled up carpet is taken to the stage.

All this preparatory work is done in complete silence, everyone is afraid lest their name should be uttered before the ceremonial (*P'o-t'ai k'ai-lo* 破台開鑼 "breaking of the stage and opening the gongs") otherwise they would be unlucky. If one would name an actor, evil spirits not yet cleared from the stage would get hold of him, and during the performance this actor would slip or forget his text, or he would be unable to sing in tune or otherwise damage the success of the presentation.

In the right back corner of the backstage a space is subdivided for a latrine which is not to be used before the *p'o-t'ai* ceremony. No outsider is allowed on stage and backstage before the ceremony as they have no knowledge of the strict rules that govern the preparations for a performance. In the afternoon between 3 and 6 o'clock everything is ready for the *p'o-t'ai* ceremony. All the actors of the troupe are assembled, and all the percussionists sit at their drums and gongs on the left side of the stage.

Two actors of the troupe who are especially trained for this ceremony go out on the stage and stick a coloured strip of paper-money to the four corners of the stage. Then one of them seizes an enormous trident-fork and the other a live cock, which has been especially chosen for its high comb. The one who holds the cock then bites into the cock's comb until it bleeds. He rushes to the four corners of the stage and, holding the cock's head in one hand, he smears blood on the paper-money he stuck there before. And then they both run madly from the left stage entrance to the front of the stage, from there out through the right exit of the stage, rushing through the backstage to the left entrance of the stage. They then cross the stage to the right side where the string and wind instruments of the orchestra are positioned and then back to the left side, where throughout this ceremony all available percussions are beaten in a frantic rhythm. During this mad rush blood

NOTES ON CHIUCHOW OPERA

75

from the cock's comb is sprinkled over stage, backstage and musical instruments. These two actors are in military costume and sometimes have painted faces. One is fiercely brandishing his trident against the invisible evil spirits. They are followed by another person holding a red bucket, who throws handfuls of rice mixed with salt and black beans in all the directions in which the cock's blood is dripped.

After they visit the percussions they go to the front of the stage, where in the middle a staircase leads down to the auditorium. There they bow three times to the deity sitting in the temple facing the stage. This is the end of the ceremony (see drawing on p. 73).

While the '*p'o-t'ai*' ceremony is in progress the old man in charge of the patron-deity shrine directs the actors to light joss-sticks and bow and kotow in front of the shrine.

The cock used in the *p'o-t'ai* ceremony is either set free or bought at a high price by those who raise chickens, as such a cock guarantees success.

Before the ceremony starts a warning is given that children should leave the area and avoid to see the ceremony, as they may be frightened or even terrified. They may be shocked for life or instantly drop dead.

After the performance there is also a short ceremony performed by two actors who portray the young man's and young girl's role. There is no music at all, they walk very fast over the stage and utter a text the words of which are known only to the initiated and are taboo to the rest of the actors. The same is true for the words uttered at the *p'o-t'ai* ceremony.

This troupe does not eat beef, and should its actors eat beef on a day on which they perform, they may suddenly feel very ill on stage. If this is the case they drink a bowl of water mixed with black vinegar, which will make them vomit the beef. They then bow before the shrine backstage, ask forgiveness for their mistake and promise never to do it again. Whereupon they feel better and can go on performing. The troupe's cook never serves beef, only fish and pork, salted vegetables, peanuts and rice-gruel, typical of the Chiuchow cuisine.

Most Chiuchow opera troupes venerate T'ien Yüan Shuai 田元帥 General T'ien, but although the Sang Ngai opera troupe's shrine,

which has the shape of a miniature temple, has the three characters Han-lin yüan 翰林院 embroidered on its red curtain it is not General T'ien who is sitting behind the ever closed curtain, but the San t'ai-tze lao-yeh 三太子老爺 the 3 princes (Mu-ch'a, Chin-ch'a and No-ch'a).*

The birthday of the San t'ai-tze lao-yeh is celebrated yearly by this troupe with special performances in the first month of the Chinese calender in the public housing estate Tung Tau Tsuen 東頭村, not far from the airport, where a whole community considers the San t'ai-tze as their patrons.

At this birthday celebration in 1976, between 9 and 10 p.m. a man suddenly came running to the temple facing the stage and donned the costume prepared on the table. No-ch'a is usually represented as a young boy: his hair tied in a bob over each ear, with his feet on fire-wheels. The man, a medium, is believed to be an ordinary man who might have never thought of No-ch'a. But on his birthday the god (here No-ch'a) will possess a person who will then only act as a medium. The man or sometimes a woman will get up from his bed, if he is sleeping, or from the table if he is eating, and rush to the square where the festivities are held without talking to anyone. Sometimes 3 people appear being possessed by the 3 princes. If the god in this temple has proved to be particularly efficacious (*ling* 靈) then this event is expected and the respective clothes for the god are already prepared on a table specially marked with a green bamboo 3m high attached to its leg.† The costume for the god is usually put into a flat round basket and a weapon is placed besides. The medium puts on No-ch'a's costume, a yellow silk blouse and trousers and on the head he puts a band with the two hairknots attached, shaking all the while and aided by those who have expected his arrival. When dressed the medium takes up the weapon, a solid spiky iron-ball on a chain, and wields it against his own body, beating his back and chest, perhaps to prove that he is actually possessed by the god.

* Doré, *Chinese Superstitions*, Taipei 66, Vol. 7, p. 413 and Vol. 9, p. 111 E. T. C. Werner: *Dictionary of Chinese Mythology*, page 247.

† Such a bamboo is also fastened to the roof of the stage or where rituals for the dead are held: it indicates the presence of spirits or marks the place to which spirits are invited to come.

NOTES ON CHIUCHOW OPERA

77

By that time the audience who were watching the opera* becomes aware of the medium, who is now rushing through the audience on to the stage, where the performance stops and the actors retreat. A table is placed on the stage, the medium stands behind the table facing the audience, shaking in trance, beating himself with the spiky iron ball. A dozen men surround him, one spraying water from a bucket in all directions, one throwing rice around, several beating gongs. They take away his weapon and give the medium some water to drink from a bowl, they hand him a sword which he brandishes into all directions of heaven. He then opens his mouth, sticks out his tongue with the tip downward, and holding the sword vertically pointing upward he inflicts small cut-wounds to the middle of his tongue. Stacks of yellow paper in various sizes are already prepared on the table, and he bends down and chops the paper with his bleeding tongue, whilst the helpers take away the marked ones to distribute them to the crowd. When the medium's tongue stops bleeding he again drinks water from the bowl, brandishes the sword and cuts his tongue and repeats this whole process several times, shaking all the while, and the deafening gongs never stop being beaten. He finally beats himself once more with the iron ball and blood streaks appear on the back of his costume. Then he is rushed back to the temple where he repeats once more the scene, as on stage. After that he takes off his costume and returns quietly home. They suppose that he is unaware of what he has been doing, and that the wounds of his lacerated tongue and back will have healed by the next morning.

The members of the opera-troupe who play the military roles, handling knives and swords also to the venerate Kuan-ti 關帝 the god of war on his birthday on the 13th day of the 5th month.

In recent years, the Chiuchow opera in Hong Kong has received a great boost when Hsiao Nan-ying 蕭南英, a top Chiuchow actress, came to Hong Kong and started to perform in 1974. She has re-trained the actors of the Sang Ngai opera troupe and has written some libretti for them in the style of the reformed traditional plays, a movement which was created under Mei Lan-fang's influence. She produced the libretti, directed the performance, played the leading

* From the stage a roof extends to shelter the audience, it rests on pillars and the 3 sides are open. As in church (in Europe and formerly in Protestant mission churches in China) the sexes are divided, women on the left and men on the right. There is a fenced passage-way through the middle up to the stairs leading to the stage.

part, and even the music was streamlined by her. There are up to date eight plays in their repertoire: Pa-pao kung-chu 八寶公主 princess Pa-pao; T'ao-hua huo tu 桃花過渡 also called Su Liu-niang 蘇六娘; Shih yü-cho 拾玉鐲; The Jade-bracelet; Ch'en San Wu-Niang 陳三五娘; Tze Liang Chi 刺梁驥; T'ang Po-hu tien ch'iu-hsiang 唐伯虎點秋香(三笑姻緣); Shou Shu-yüan 搜書院; and Tze Lang-chu 辭郎洲.

Here is the content of two of these operas as they were performed by Hsiao Nan-ying in Hong Kong in 1975.

STABBING LIANG CHI (刺梁驥)

Liang Chi, a treacherous prefect, passes through the streets and his guards catch a man who roamed about instead of retiring at the approach of the prefect. When questioned, it turns out that he is a fortune-teller. The prefect dismisses his entourage and encourages the fortune-teller to look at his face and tell his fortune. After some hesitation he talks professional terminology about Liang's eyes and physiognomy and asks him about his age. 63 was the answer. Then he would be stabbed in the next 3 days; but if he could avoid it he would be very successful thereafter. If he wants to avoid it—and he asked the lord to go backwards 3 steps—then he should not go out of his house and not see anyone from outside for 3 days.

The fortune-teller, although afraid, was rather satisfied with the prospect to see this wretched lord killed.

After this the fortune-teller wished to get out of the house as fast as possible, but the lord called his housekeeper and ordered him to feed the fortune-teller.

The gates were locked and orders given, and then the lord planned to enjoy these 3 days of unexpected leisure. As he had just got a new lady in his residence, he gave orders that she should serve him the wine that night.

The new lady (performed by Hsiao Nan-ying) was in fact the daughter of a fisherman whom the lord had killed with an arrow. The fisherman's daughter had come instead of another, in order to avenge her father. When she was summoned, she knew that this was her chance to fulfill her vows. She took a hair pin from her hair, and decided that she would stab him with it. The ladies-in-waiting brought a crown and gorgeous red garments to dress her for

NOTES ON CHIUCHOW OPERA

79

the occasion. Trembling yet decided to carry out her plan, she enters the lord's chamber. She moves in the most alluring way and greets the lord coquettishly. And the lord is surprised to see such a beauty. 'How fortunate am I to be blessed with such a beautiful girl in my old age', he laughs loudly and roughly. Then she offers him wine with all good wishes and succeeds in making him drunk.

Suddenly a secret message is delivered; the lord dismisses everyone and reads it. There is an uprising and he is ordered to get it under control as quickly as possible. But how could he leave the house? No; he excuses himself because of illness and dispatches someone else to take care of it. He seizes the brush but is unable to write and sinks on the table, passing out because of over-indulgence in wine. The fisher-girl comes back with a cup of wine and when she is sure of his state, she realises her opportunity. She disappears and returns in fighting dress, blue blouse and trousers, tucked-in white pleated skirt, hair in a tail hanging down, ready to avenge. She trembles, then musters up courage, but when he moves she falls down shocked. Finally she seizes him, and as he raises his head she pushes her pin into his chest. They fight before he finally dies.

These movements of the girl are some of the most interesting in the Chiuchow opera repertoire.

Suddenly she hears voices and fears to be discovered. She quickly hides under the heavy brocades of the table cover. The ladies-in-waiting find the body and call the housekeeper who immediately calls the fortune-teller, because as he knew that the lord would be stabbed, he could now state by whom. The fortune-teller accuses everyone of those present and then chases them out. Then he taps on the table and the girl comes out. They recognize each other because she has once saved his life. Quickly she explains why she did it, and how, and begs him to save her.

The fortune-teller, hearing about the secret message, quickly writes into it, "as it is my fault and I am unable to serve my country, I kill myself".

The girl hides again, the household comes back and the fortune-teller explains the letter. Then he says, "Oh, an uprising, the rebels will be here soon and then it's difficult to save one's life, so save who can". They all run for their lives.

The girl comes out of hiding, and the fortune-teller takes her to safety.

SU LIU-NIANG (SIXTH DAUGHTER SU) 蘇六娘

Drama in 10 acts, lasting about 3½ hours.

Dramatis personae: Su family: Uncle, the eldest of the Su clan
Mr. Su and Mrs. Su, their daughter, Liu-niang (6th young lady),*
her maid, T'ao-hua 桃花, 1 girl-servant and 2 man-servants
young master Yang 楊子良 and his wet-nurse
young master Kuo 郭繼春, cousin of Liu-niang

Act I

Tao-hua the maid comes to the river returning from Hsi-lu 西蘆 with a parasol, gay silk trousers and jacket, her hair in two knots one over each ear garlanded with flowers, the temple hair hanging down in two long strands which are adorned with coloured silk-strings. She calls the ferryman [old man-servant type with white beard], who arrives rowing with an oar. There are no other stage props. The movement of the boat is all indicated by mime.

T'ao-hua hides behind the parasol fooling the ferryman and suddenly surprises him by showing her face. Then she pretends to be afraid to jump on the ferry, so the old man tries hard to bring the boat closer. With a wicked smile she jumps on the boat with all her strength, causing it almost to turn over. They perform a beautiful dance to balance the boat and she pretends to be terribly frightened.

They then start chatting and T'ao-hua proposes to sing a couplet each, composing it as they go along. But which of them first says things that are wrong or cannot rhyme has lost. The old man starts, "In the first month all flowers bloom". T'ao-hua carries on, "In the 2nd month the cotton tree blooms" and so on

* The names of sons and daughters of important families (those with high doors) in these operas are called, for example, Su Liu-niang, meaning the sixth daughter of the Su family. The parents Su have only one daughter, but she is still called the sixth daughter because she is the sixth girl born in this generation to all the brothers of Mr. Su. The same is the case for Wu-niang meaning 5th daughter, called such although she is the only child of her parents. Ch'en San is the third (son) of the Ch'en clan. The term 妹 'niang' is an address for a young lady, whereas the word 姊 'sister' is used for a girl of humble birth.

NOTES ON CHIUCHOW OPERA

81

until the 12th month. Then it is the ferryman's turn again and he happily goes on, "In the 13th month." but T'ao-hua catches him, "Haha! You have lost because there is no 13th month". They argue but he cannot win, and now they realise that the current has taken the boat too far downstream. This is a most delightful scene, a fully choreographed dance with the music based on Chiuchow folk tunes. The music and the dance are fresh and cheerful. This opening shows characteristic features of Chiuchow opera; it is beautiful, lighthearted and full of songs and dances.

Act II

takes place in the garden of the Kuo family's mansion in Hsi-lu. Hsi-lu is the native place of Mrs. Su who is of the family Kuo. As she has only one daughter Liu-niang she always sends her to Hsi-lu to study and to play in the company of her cousin Kuo Chi-ch'un, with whom she has fallen in love. Liu-niang decided to declare her love to him today. She carefully drops a jade-pendant, and when she hears his steps, hides and lets him search for a while, and then throws a flower at him. He now expresses his understanding of the purpose of this meeting, but she of course denies it, blushing with embarrassment. He finds the jade-pendant, and realises how earnest she is about her feelings. So he cannot hold back any longer the news that he is leaving to sit for the civil examination; but they vow that when he comes back they will happily stay together like two butterflies. T'ao-hua appears and watches this scene, and jeers at them. The young lady takes a pin from her hair and asks T'ao-hua to act as go-between, then she hurries away. T'ao-hua gives the pin as a betrothal gift to the cousin, and asks him to take up the question of marriage seriously after his return. Then she follows her young lady.

Act III

The eldest member of the Su clan visits Mr. and Mrs. Su, and urges them to think of marrying off their daughter. He has a very good match in mind, namely the son of the Yang family who is not only very well-to-do and young but has already passed the District Civil Examination and can call himself *Hsiu-tsai* 秀才 (elegant talent). Mr. Su is indeed very pleased to hear of these prospects, and agrees wholeheartedly to this match.

After the eldest of the Su clan has left, Mrs. Su accuses her husband of dealing with such an important matter too lightly; agree-

ing without giving any thought to it, and above all without hearing the opinion of their daughter about it. But the father repudiates these comments, saying that it is the duty of parents to choose a husband for their daughter and the duty of the daughter to obey.

Act IV

As soon as the daughter has returned from cousin Kuo's home, the parents inform her about the arranged marriage. Completely shocked she says that this is out of the question, and that they should ask T'ao-hua for the reason. Then she bursts into tears and runs out. T'ao-hua is terribly frightened and follows her, but is summoned back by Mr. Su.

Now the questioning begins. A girl servant fetches "the law of the house" [two approx. 60 cm long bamboo-halves fastened together on one side as a handle*]. It comes out that as the daughter spent so many happy years playing and studying with her cousin, the children's fondness for each other has grown into love. They have already openly declared their love and vowed to marry.

T'ao-hua is scolded and accused of letting all this happen, and is asked why did she not inform the parents. Mr. Su beats her. The movements of this scene are beautifully mimed and choreographed into dance, as T'ao-hua kneels and whimpers cries for mercy. Mr. Su holds her left hand and mimes to beat her back. She walks in a circle around him using the *ai-tze-pu* 矮子步 (dwarf-step) very characteristic of Chiuchow opera. It has been suggested that this imitates the shadow-puppet's way of hurried walk. The knees are bent because the puppet has a joint there, but this joint is not controlled. [In this dwarf-step one foot is put on the ground, then that knee is put on the ground, then the other foot, and then the other knee, etc.].

But then the mother scolds the father for bringing their only daughter into such a calamity. They now both listen to T'ao-hua's clever arguments and sympathise with their daughter and her maid. They decide to put off the intended marriage with the Yang family until they find a way out of this contract.

Act V

Mr. Yang travels with his wet-nurse to Chiuchow to visit the Su family personally. Being betrothed to Su Liu-niang he wants

* 家法, used for punishment.

NOTES ON CHIUCHOW OPERA

83

to find out the reason for the continual postponement of the marriage. He is characterised as a clown, and the fat wet-nurse appears also as a go-between, a funny character in many Chinese operas. This scene gives ample opportunity to display the vocabulary of comic jokes, movements and mime typical of the Chiuchow opera. He wears gay red costumes, and carries a fan which he handles like a juggler. In this scene the two are describing their long climb by walking in various ways in a circle, pausing to admire the scenery.

The wet-nurse asks the learned *Hsiu-tsai* for the names and explanations of things seen along the way. "And this mountain?"

"It is called Han Mountain."

"And this river?"

"It is called Han River."

"And that ancestor temple over there?"

"It is the Han Memorial Temple."

"Why is everything here called Han?"

"Because the great scholar Han Yü was sent from the Capital to Chiuchow and gave his name to all these."*

"Oh, you and your father are like the great Han Yü."

"Oh you really think so? Why?"

"Because Han Yü grabbed all the mountains, the river and the ancestor hall, and so on, and now you and your father grab the people's land."

The wet-nurse carries an umbrella and a red pao-fu 包袱 or a cloth-roll containing provisions for the journey, slung over the shoulder which is the traditional requisite to indicate travelling. On the Chinese stage luggage is never carried to indicate arrival, departure or travel, but a bamboo-umbrella or a red *pao-fu*, or both, are used instead.

The *Hsiu-tsai* is complaining about the Su family who are constantly postponing his marriage with their daughter, and is wondering what strange reason there may be behind it. They come to a gate erected by the emperor's order to honour a woman who has demonstrated her chastity under hard conditions. The *Hsiu-tsai*

* For a notice of Han Yü (768-824) see Harbert A. Giles *A Chinese Biographical Dictionary*, London and Shanghai, 1898, pp. 254-256.

promises the wet-nurse that, if he becomes a mandarin, he will erect such a monument to her chastity, whereupon the wet-nurse cries. Asked why, she answers that this is not possible and that his father knows very well why.

Act VI

The eldest of the Su clan together with the *Hsiu-tsai* Yang come to visit Mr. and Mrs. Su. Mr. Yang, whom the parents see now for the first time, is very aggressive and accuses his parents-in-law to be. Mr. Yang makes a very bad impression on them, being ugly and of mean character. They are determined to get out of this marriage contract. But Mr. Yang threatens to take them to court. Mr. Su finds it difficult to answer why he does not want to keep his word. How can he and his wife confess that their daughter has fallen in love and that they support her romantic choice? It would be against all rules of decency. So they repeat the fact that she is their only child and still so young, and that the Yang family is living so far away. But Mr. Yang argues that she is already over 16, which is the right age for a girl to marry.

T'ao-hua is also present and argues with Mr. Yang with her quick and sharp tongue. The parents are pleased to get help against this ruffian, but the eldest Su is appalled. "How can you allow your slave-girl to have a say in your affairs?" he asks. At this point the parents realise that this is against all the rules, and they send T'ao-hua away.

However, the eldest of the Su clan is annoyed by the arrogant behaviour of Mr. Yang. He asks him to leave and let him handle this awkward matter. When the three of them are alone the parents try again to persuade the eldest Su to help them to get out of this contract, and start to explain why. But the eldest does not want to listen, and states what a shame it would be for the whole Su clan if the daughter is allowed to follow her own inclination. The eldest finally forces the parents to send their daughter to the Yang family's house on the next morning. The eldest Su exits with a content 'haha', as the mother is scolding the girl's father saying that it is all his fault.

Act VII

The daughter Lu-niang in her chamber is desperate at the news that she has to be married tomorrow to the Yang family. When

NOTES ON CHIUCHOW OPERA

85

she hears the beat of the second night watch she runs around her chamber, throwing up her sleeves in despair. A servant girl brings in her wedding dress folded on a tray. Then Mr. Yang's wet-nurse drops in, calling her already 'wife' of her *Hsiu-tsai* and promising to come and comb her hair next morning. Then Liu-niang's mother comes to console her. The daughter says, "Mother, how can you send me away! I am your own flesh and blood."

Her mother then tells her that they have sent T'ao-hua to Hsi-lu, and it may be that she will not return until tomorrow night. This would mean that Liu-niang would have to leave for the Yang family's residence without her maid.

At this thought the daughter pretends to resign herself to her fate. She asks her mother to go to bed and promises that she will do the same. As soon as the mother has left, the daughter decides that on no account will she go to the Yang family. If T'ao-hua does not return with news from her cousin Kuo, she will drown herself in the river.

At the 3rd watch she writes her last letter to her parents, and runs out of the house.

Act VIII

Hurrying to the river, pitying herself, she suddenly bumped into T'ao-hua. And here starts the happy end to this tale. The daughter Su relates that suddenly the Yang family have pressed her parents in agreeing to the marriage on the next day and that now she only has suicide as a solution to her grief. At this moment the handsome cousin Kuo arrives. Having heard of the confusion from T'ao-hua he insists on returning with her in order to put matters straight. T'ao-hua is always alert and watching out, to see whether they are being followed. The old ferryman, who has listened to their conversation, calls T'ao-hua and offers to take the couple across the river to facilitate their elopement. When the three of them are on the ferry T'ao-hua asks for Liu-niang's shoes, which she drops on the bank of the river

Act IX

At sunrise Yang's wet-nurse hurries to Liu-niang's chamber to dress her hair for the wedding. Calling 'Hsiu-tsai Niang' in all directions, she cannot find the girl and quickly alerts the parents. Sear-

ching the room they find the parting letter on her desk. The mother starts wailing, cursing her husband. They call the servants to check the house, and the two male servants return and report that they found the back-gate open. They panic, and the wet-nurse rushes out to inform the groom's family.

Act X

The servants lead the way with lanterns to the river. Mr. and Mrs. Su are followed soon after by the eldest of the Su clan, and by Mr. Yang and his wet-nurse. Then the group meets T'ao-hua and she joins in the search. Mr. Su now accuses Mr. Yang of having pushed their daughter to commit suicide. Mr. Yang reads Liu-niang's last letter but is not impressed. Perhaps it is a trick to avoid the marriage. He will not believe it until he has tangible proof.

After walking in many circles they come to the bank of the river, where a servant discovers the shoes of Liu-niang. The parents wail and scold Mr. Yang, and finally the old ferryman approaches with his oar. When asked whether he had seen Liu-niang, he answers that he did not see anybody, but heard a big splash. Whereupon the whole party decides to return home.

The ferryman calls back T'ao-hua and triumphantly tells her that he can now finish the couplet of the 13th month, because every so many years there is in fact an intercalary 13th month. And on this gay note the play ends, providing the reason why this opera is colloquially called "T'ao-hua Crosses the River".

Act VIII is the climax of the play and Act IX and X the anti-climax.

FOOTNOTE

Chiuchow Opera and Peking Opera

The repertoire of Chiuchow opera contains plays taken from the Peking opera, as well as plays based on Chiuchow's local traditions. *Ch'en San Wu-niang* and *Su Liu-niang* are both typical Chiuchow operas which have no parallel in the Peking opera. Both are elegant and refined literary operas, with a very strong local flavour in the treatment and development of the subject, and in the music and performance style.

In a Peking opera the hard laws of society, the five relationships instituted by Confucius, are more important than human happiness; and in Peking opera the same plot would have quite a different dénouement, most probably with a tragic end. How would a well-kept young lady ever dare

NOTES ON CHIUCHOW OPERA

87

to go against her parents, or go so far as to run away with her secret love? It would be unthinkable and outrageous. Because, just as today, the *Yang-pan* 洋班 or Revolutionary Peking Opera has to propagate a certain moral and ethics, with any other human behaviour being excluded from the stage, so the Peking opera, which used to be under official support and supervision, could not deviate from the officially supported Confucian ideals.

The southern coastal areas of China were not "enlightened" by the Confucian civilization of the Yellow River plains until the Tang Dynasty, when the minister Han Yü, an eminent scholar, was sent into exile to Chiuchow because he tried to prevent the spread of Buddhism in China. He worked hard to instill Confucian values into the local population, and to set up a Confucian social and administrative system. Han Yü must have made a great impression on this area because his name appears frequently, not least in the name of the river which attracted the settlers to build Chiuchow on its banks, which is called after him, Han River.