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THE BEGINNINGS OF THEATRICAL REFLECTION
IN ANCIENT CHINA *

There have been many different theories concerning the beginnings of theatrical spectacles in China. Some researchers connected the original spectacles with the Shamanistic dances in honour of the gods and demons, some with the early puppet performances while others saw the beginnings of the Chinese theatre in dance shows at the Royal Court as well as in the performances of the royal fools. From historical chronicles we can learn that in the Spring and Autumn epoch (8th—5th c. B.C.) at the prince's court in the dukedom of Chu, south of the lands that were then Chinese civilization, there lived a fool called Meng who appeared once before his ruler dressed in the robes of a minister, who had long since been dead, and by imitating his gestures and manner of speech recalled his achievements and loyalty. Thanks to his performance the dignitary's relatives were duly taken care of by the prince. This event has been acknowledged by certain research workers as the earliest known case of acting in China.

As it can be seen from the above mentioned hypotheses concerning how the theatre in China came into being, the Chinese researching this problem clearly differentiated between the notion of the theatre and that of drama, treating drama as one of the theatrical forms. Although it is most widely developed today, it took shape relatively late. In nearly thirty centuries of Chinese literature, dramatic works did not appear until the turn of the 13th and 14th centuries. In actual fact, they came

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into being in two independent varieties — the northern and the southern. Much earlier, however, as I have already mentioned, we have proof of the existence in China of various types of shows and performances which can be acknowledged as the origin of the Chinese theatre and which later influenced the shaping of certain dramatic forms in a very decisive manner. Music, song and dance, in part, always played the most important role in those forms, while elements of dialogue and acting, as well as the plots of plays, were a later addition and initially held much less meaning.

Music, song and dance were also the first elements of the earliest shows in China and it was with those components that theatrical reflection was concerned.

Before we pass on to discussing opinions and reflections on the oldest known spectacles, it is worth devoting a few words to the old meanings of the signs in Chinese writing denoting old Chinese performances. Two such terms deserve special attention.

The older of the two, the sign 樂, appearing in inscriptions on oracle bones in the 11th—10th c. B.C., pronounced today as *yue*, meant music and different types of shows, especially dance shows accompanied by music. There exists also another reading of this sign, *lo*, meaning "joy, gaiety" but it is a later borrowing and although the atmosphere expressed through it might have had some connection with making music, it applied to the shows themselves in a very loose manner. The oldest graphic forms of the sign *yue* were interpreted in the first Chinese etymological dictionary *Shuo-wen jie-zi* (*Explanation of the writing and analysis of signs*) by Xu Shen (the work was completed in the year 100) as "the general name for five sounds and eight tones. The sign represents a wooden frame for drums and tambours." (*yue wu-sheng-ba-yin zong-ming. xiang gu-pi mu-ju ye*).¹ A slightly different opinion on the subject of the etymology of the sign *yue* is expressed by Kang Yin, a contemporary researcher of the beginnings of Chinese writing, in his work *Comments on the Sources of Chinese Writing* (*Wen-zi yuan-liu qian-shuo*).² On the basis of the forms of the sign *yue* found in the inscriptions on the prophetic bones as well as on bronze offering dishes, i.e. on the oldest relics of Chinese writing, he states that this sign then represented a certain type of musical string instrument with the strings being made from silk threads. This interpretation is highly probable, taking into account the great similarity, even in their contemporary form, of both the right and the left top graphic elements of the

¹ Xu Shen, *Shuo-wen jie-zi*, Pekin 1978, p. 124.

² Kang Yin, *Wen-zi yuan-liu qian-shuo*, Pekin 1979, p. 552.

sign *yue* with the sign *si* 糸, meaning a silk thread, and the references in the old relics of Chinese writing on the existence of string instruments even in the times of the legendary caesar Shun who was supposed to have ruled in China in the 24th c. B.C.

As I have already mentioned, the sign *yue* primarily meant music (initially maybe certain musical instruments as well) while in the classical epoch, i.e. a few centuries B.C., it also defined certain types of court spectacles consisting of music, song and dance. At the beginning, this term was used in relation to all types of shows but as time passed, the range of its meaning narrowed to orthodox spectacles and ceremonies connected with the state cult originating from the teaching of Confucius. Folk performances, however, turning further and further away from the still Confucian norms of life, were defined with the term *san-yue*, "scattered music", i.e. shows that were abandoning established norms. Included in the *san-yue* category during the Han dynasty (2nd.c. B.C.—2nd.c.A.D.) were, among others, shows based on dances and parades of actors dressed up as either wild or mythological animals, while a few centuries later, in the times of the development of Chinese drama, the term *san-yue* meant an actor, especially a wandering actor not connected with one stage or court theatre.

Another term containing the *yue* element is *yue-fu* (a direct translation would be the music department). Initially, i.e. at the beginning of our era, this term in actual fact meant a court office that was concerned with the collecting of folk songs that, to a certain extent, expressed the moods prevalent in society. Soon after, however, (the office itself was soon liquidated) this term meant a certain type of poetry originating from folk tradition and different from the classical models. During the times of the development of Chinese drama in the 13th—14th century it was used to mark different dramatic plays.

A second word that still appears very often today in the names of

different theatrical and spectacular performances is the term *xi* 戲. We can come across one of the earlier applications of this word in the name *bai-xi* (a hundred plays) meaning a type of show that was exceptionally popular in the first centuries A.D. (I discussed this type of show in detail in the article *On Early Chinese Theatrical Performances*³) Furthermore, this word appears as a morpheme in the names of various types of shows and theatrical performances as for example *xi-ju* (theatre), *xi-qu* (Chinese opera), *jing-xi* (the Pekino opera), *nan-xi*

³ Cf. „Rocznik Orientalistyczny” (Oriental Annual), vol. XXVI, no. 1, Warszawa 1962, pp. 65—77 + 6 pl.

(a southern variety of Chinese drama), *ma-xi* (circus), *ying-xi* (theatre of shadows) and many others. It is also necessary to mention here that this word was sometimes used in meanings that had no connection whatsoever with any types of performances.

It seems that the graphic shape of the word *xi* is an extremely important factor pointing to essential elements that are characteristic of many styles of the Chinese classical theatre and of other spectacles. In the above mentioned dictionary, *Shuo-wen jie-zi*, the sign *xi* has been explained as *bing*, "a type of weapon, arms".⁴ Duan Yu-cai, an 18th c. commentator on the dictionary, suggests that from the original meaning of weapon there appeared the second meaning "entertainment"⁵, as with arms it is possible both to fight and to play. It is necessary to stress here, though, that the word *xi* in the meaning of "weapon" has not been found in the literary or historical texts from the Han epoch as in those times it already meant a certain type of game or even show. From then till the present day, spectacles containing the *xi* element have been based, to large degree, on shows of strength and deftness that are, in a sense, the opposite of shows defined by the term *yue* in which the elements of music and song are in the majority. Dances could be either included in the category of *yue* performances or in the more violent shows containing the *xi* element in their name.

On the basis of various written documents, the earliest spectacles in Chinese culture go back to practically legendary times. They were connected with ritual dances and songs commemorating successful hunting, work on the regulation of rivers, different stages of land cultivation and also the victorious ending to war campaigns. In such cases, part of the community of the original Chinese tribes would perform in the roles of actors, singers or dancers, while the remaining part as spectators would observe the performances taking place.

Various indications of reflections on the nature and the function of those oldest spectacles are scattered in the form of a few statements in different relics of Chinese classical literature. One of the first works in which those comments were collected into one chapter, and where there is also quite a lot of reflection on the social role of those spectacles was *Lǚ-shi chun qiu*, *The Chronicle of a Nobleman from the Lǚ Family*. It is a collection of treatises written by scholars representing various schools of thought, and gathered together under the palace roof of the nobleman Lǚ Bu-wei from the state of Qin in the second half of the 3rd c. B.C. This chronicle consisted of 160 works and, by its very nature, was extremely eclectic. It also contained several chapters that were to

⁴ Xu Shen, *op. cit.*, p. 266.

⁵ Duan Yu-cai, cf. Ding Fu-bao, *Shuo-wen jie-zi gu-lin* (*Comments to "Explanation of the Writing and Analysis of Sings"*), Shanghai 1937, p. 5684.

a smaller or larger extent devoted to ancient Chinese music and to forms of shows. For us here the most important treatise seems to be the one entitled *Gu-yue*, "Old Music (Shows)".⁶

The beginning of the treatise states that the origins of music shows go back to ancient times and, at the same time, all the shows are divided into those that were in accordance with the principles of etiquette, that were in force at the time, and their presentation being also in agreement with the present day ethical norms, and those which were not in accordance with those norms and broke the rules of decency. Music shows also performed a magical function being the means of assuring the proper type of weather and climate in the different seasons of the year so they would satisfy the needs of the cultivation of grain and would increase the number of game. Those shows were also a form of ceremony in honour of the heavens, the Earth, sometimes also being connected with the cult for one's ancestors. Some of the dances — shows were like totemic ceremonies and their function was to bring about the development of the ruling house's totem.

From the *Gu-yue* treatise we find out that the music shows which came into being in the times of the ruler Cheng-tang, (1766—1753 B.C.), the founder of the Shang dynasty, consisted of three dancers waving ox-tails about and beating out the rhythm with their feet while dancing. Songs were sung in this rhythm. The spectacle consisted of eight parts:

The first part was called: *The Birth of the People*. (It was probably a hymn in honour of the great deeds of the ancestor and founder of the tribe.)

The second part was called: *Swallow* (A swallow was the totem of the Shang people and this part of the show probably consisted of ritualistic songs and a pantomime swallow dance.)

The third part was called: *The Flourishing of Grasses and Trees*. (Through a specific vocal — dance spectacle this part of the show was to ascertain the abundant growth of vegetation.)

The fourth part was called: *For Rich Crops in Five Types of Grain* (hemp, two types of millet, wheat and barley). They were probably songs and dances meant to ascertain a great harvest.

The fifth part was called: *In Honour of Eternal Heavenly Rights* (and included hymns and dances connected with the cult for Heaven).

The sixth part was called: *Joy from the Graces sent by the Heavenly Ruler*. (It consisted of songs and dances symbolically presenting showers of rain and sun-rays as gifts from Heaven.)

The seventh part was called: *Let's Profit from the Gifts of the Earth*. (This was a dance and vocal form of thanksgiving for the Fruits of the Earth).

⁶ *Lü-shi chun-ciu*, ed. Si-bu cong-kan, Shanghai 1936, vol. 95, pp. 32—33.

The eighth part was called: *A Great Gathering of Ten Thousand Beings*. (Commentators on the text suppose that this was the final part of the spectacle in which the dancers participated, dressed up as animals and birds, and in which gratitude was expressed towards heaven, the earth and to the ghosts of their ancestors for graces received.)

As it can be presumed from the judgements presented in the above mentioned treatise, one of the functions of the dances performed could have been to toughen up the muscles and gain strength for the battle against the disaster of a flood. In *Gu-yue* we discover that in the times of the legendary caesar, Yao, who ruled at the turn of the 24th and 23rd centuries B.C. there was great disaster caused by flooding in his country.

The people tried to stop the rolling waters with great passion but the muscles and bones of those fighting with the elements grew numb and stiffened with the cold. It was then that a dance was thought up thanks to which their muscles gained in strength and they could direct the waters from the flood into their proper course.

The legendary caesar, Di-gu (2435—2365), told his court musician, Xian-hei to arrange a new musical spectacle. When the sounds of the music rang forth, the caesar ordered his people to clap rhythmically and then told those who were dressed up as phoenixes and pheasants to dance to the music. The caesar enjoyed the performance immensely and stated that it gave a picture of the great virtues of the ruler of nature.

It is also worth to mention the spectacles from the times of the caesar Yu (2205—2197 B.C.), the famous suppressor of the Chinese flood that can be compared to the one from the Bible. We read in *Gu-yue* that when work on subjugating the flood had been completed, the great Yu ordered one Gao-tao to compose a piece entitled *Da-xia* (The Great Flourishing), accompanied by the flute to commemorate his exceptional deeds.

From the discussed treatise we can discover that later Chinese rulers, especially the founders of dynasties, recorded their deeds through composing appropriate spectacles themselves or ordering their court musicians to do so.

Let us turn, though, to historical times, i.e. to the reign of the Zhou dynasty (11th—3rd c. B.C.). The *Book of Songs* (Shi-jing), comprised of more than three hundred works, is the oldest Chinese collection of folk and ritual songs and its origins lie in the first century of that period. From this collection, we can presume that some of the songs were sung in farming communities during the breaks made between the different jobs done on the land, while others were sung at the royal court during ceremonies connected with the end of the hunt, with work in the fields or with victorious battles. Some songs, described as hymns, were sung in honour of the heavenly and earthly idols and also as an offering to

the ancestors of the reigning sovereign. A few titles to works that had no lyrics have been preserved and due to this the conclusion is usually that they were destined to be performed solely on musical instruments without the participation of a choir. There also exists quite a general conviction that the majority of works included in *Shi-jing* were presented in the form of a spectacle the aim of which could have been the winning of natural forces for a successful harvest or expressing gratitude to the gods — the guardians of heaven and earth — as well as to the ghosts of their ancestors.

According to tradition, half-way through the first thousand years B.C. the collection of the *Book of Songs* was redrafted by Confucius and then was included in what is known as the *Five Books of Confucius*. From that time, the *Shi-jing* works have received a Confucian interpretation which has brought forth innumerable comments, has looked upon those works and their functions in various ways as well as with a certain amount of reflection on their meanings.

We wish to quote here a few comments on the subject of the works of *Shi-jing*, formulated by Wei Hong who wrote the great introduction to this collection and who lived in the middle of the first century A.D. He writes that

The song *shi* is what our wishes aim at. In the heart they are only a wish but become a song when formed into words. Feelings that move our hearts reveal themselves in words. When it is not possible to withhold our feelings in our hearts we cry out and sigh; when that does not suffice we express our feelings through songs. When plaintive singing is not enough, our hands start moving subconsciously and our feet begin to dance.

Sounds serve to express feelings. Sounds create a melody when they achieve beauty. Melodies from the times of general order pass from peace to joy because there exists harmony among the rulers. Melodies from the periods of chaos and anarchy pass from sorrow to anger as the authorities are in a state of disagreement. Melodies of countries on the decline pass from grief to sadness as the people's unhappiness is immense.

This is why there is nothing more important than songs which would fairly express victory and disaster, would move heaven and earth and would shock both demons and ghosts."⁷

From the quoted fragment, it appears that the performed songs and dances, and certain spectacles, were to be a reflection of the moods and feelings present in the hearts of the society and, at the same time, a specific, and in a sense, automatic reaction of society to the situation of the ruling classes.

Problems concerning music and music shows held an extremely

⁷ Da-xu (*The Great Introduction*) to *Shi-jing*, quoted acc. *Zhong-guo li dai wen-lun xuan* (*A Choice of Chinese Treatises from Various Epochs*), Shanghai 1979, p. 63.

important place in the philosophical systems of various ancient Chinese sages. One of the most famous was Confucius who lived at the turn of the 6th and 5th c. B.C. Among the five books whose thoughts are ascribed to this philosopher there is also the *Book of Music* (*Yue-jing*). Although this book disappeared a long time ago, the very fact of it being connected with the name of Confucius proves the great role music played in his system.

Music in the ethical system of Confucianism is usually connected with etiquette and with the ability to realize the main virtues of noble-minded people. Etiquette divided society according to age, sex and social position, pointing out how each person should behave. It also restrained feelings. Music, as well as certain music shows, grouped together everybody belonging to a given social class and also stirred up their feelings, encouraging them to joint activity.

According to the followers of Confucius, music was the expression of feelings. We read in one of the later Confucian treatises that

the sounds of music have their origin in the heart of man. The human heart is moved because of external things (events). It is moved by its emotional attitude towards events taking place and reveals itself in sounds... Music comes from sounds and reveals the feelings of man towards some thing or event.⁸

According to other definitions included in Confucian texts, music and music shows revealed the wishes and aims of man. Contrary to the Taoists and Moists, about whom more will be said later, the followers of Confucius did not negate the need of certain human goals and that is why they were in favour of cultivating music. They saw the division into good and evil not in the very possessing of goals by people but in revealing them. Possessing goals was something quite acceptable but the way they were revealed was regulated (by the state or society) and this was done in the form of music shows, among others. In the case of revealing goals that were accepted as being positive, they met with approval. Otherwise, they underwent criticism and limitation as being harmful to the believers on Confucian etiquette.

As we can see, for the Confucians music was a form of expressing human aims and feelings. However, it was only those aims and feelings which were expressed by an appropriate music form that could be properly understood and accepted, bringing about reciprocation on the part of ghosts or of people still living, in honour of whom this music or show was presented. According to the Confucian doctrine of thought, however, were all feelings worth manifesting? No, they were not. Although eti-

⁸ Quoted in the historical chronicle of Si-ma Qian (145—90 B.C.), *Shi-jī* (*Notes by a Historian*), Peking 1973, p. 1179.

quette and music guaranteed sincerity, this was based on expressing only those feelings and thoughts which one was supposed to have (due to the position held in the social hierarchy) and not those which one might have had by chance. Etiquette and music served to awaken trust and to gain goodwill. The achievement of this was only possible through preserving appropriate norms in the choice of spectacles that would be in accordance with the occasions when they were to be presented.

From the *Confucian Dialogues* (*Lun-yu*) we find out that Confucius himself very often criticised the inappropriate way in which the dances and songs were performed as they were not in agreement with the principles set down by him. At the same time, though, he fully admired their beauty and their social meaning. In the *Dialogues* we read:

While spending some time in the Kingdom of Ts'i the master became acquainted with Shao music [composed in the times of the legendary caesar Shun and acknowledged as the height of perfection by the Confucians—T. Z.]. For three months he did not even feel the taste of meat [he was so taken up with it that he did not eat meat—T. Z.]. He then said, I did not know that this music had achieved such perfection.⁹

In another place we also find an opinion that is full of praise:

The master said that Shao music was both beautiful and full of goodness while the Wu music, on the other hand, was beautiful but there was no goodness in it.¹⁰

The first three fragments of Chapter III include Confucius' critical attitude towards the shows presented during his times.

Confucius said that as the head of the Ji family was bold enough to keep eight lines of dancers performing in the courtyard of his ancestors' temple, would he stop at anything else? ¹¹

According to the norms of behaviour prevalent at the time, the number of lines of dancers presenting a ritual spectacle in front of such a temple was strictly dependent on the given family's position. A king had the right to have eight lines of dancers taking part in the spectacle. Sovereign princes were permitted six lines while officials of very high rank could have four. The Ji family from the kingdom of Lu held the position of officials of high rank but were bold enough to put forward eight lines of dancers, usurping what was in fact only the right of the king.

Another case of usurpation on the part of the Ji family can be found in the next fragment of the *Confucian Dialogues*: Three Families ordered the Yung song to be sung while the offering dishes were being cleared away. The master said: This song says: Only princes are helpful here.

⁹ *Lun-yu*, ed. Si-bu cong-kan, Shanghai 1936, vol. 9, pp. 27—28.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

The son of the Heavens (the king) is worthy of respect. How can such words be announced in the temple of the Three Families' ancestors? The three families mentioned were branches of the family of the sovereign prince in Lu but the leaders of those families were actually in authority in the kingdom of Lu during the times of Confucius, and were continuously battling among one another for the highest position. The singing of the "Yung song" was reserved for the royal dynasty of Zhou during the offerings on the ancestors' altar. Because of this, the singing of this song by the Three Families in honour of their ancestors was violating the rights of hierarchy which was in existence among the ruling classes of Chinese society at the time.

As it can be presumed from the two above mentioned examples, music or music shows according to Confucius, did not mean every musical form but only those that were sanctioned by appropriate ritual rules, referring to that part of society that was privileged through the right of succession, and was capable of understanding and observing those rules. Confucius often said that "punishment does not apply to the noble-minded and etiquette does not lower itself to the commoner". Thus, in the next fragment of the *Confucian Dialogues* we find a rhetorical question posed by the Chinese sage:

The master said:

Can somebody deprived of the virtue of humaness (ren) perform ceremonies (li)?

Can somebody deprived of the virtue of humaness (ren) perform music (yue)?¹²

Thus people who presented music or took part in music shows had to be noble-minded according to Confucian norms. They had to, among other things, either belong to the ruling family or had to be related to this family. A characteristic social differentiation between *jun-zi*, "a noble-minded person", and *xiao-ren*, "a simple person", in the matter of music and performances, can be found in the chapter "On Music" in the work of a later Confucian thinker, *Xun-zi*. He wrote that:

Music is like joy. (There is a play of words here, as well as further on, resulting from the homography of the words "music" and "joy".) Music helps a noble-minded person become virtuous; it serves somebody small in fulfilling his desires. (The former) controls his desires with the help of virtue—he is happy and is not overcome by chaos (in his feelings); (the latter), overcome by his desires, forgets about virtue, is seized by doubt and nothing gives him happiness.¹³

There were also certain types of spectacles and ceremonial songs which Confucius strongly condemned and insisted his followers should

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Xun-zi*, chapter *Yue-lun* (On music), ed. Si-bu cong-kan, Shanghai 1936, vol. 72, p. 150.

avoid. The works that appeared in the small kingdoms of Zheng and Wei were criticized in this way by Confucius. We do not know today why his opinions on them were so severe but with a great deal of probability we can presume that in some way they were "new" and "different" from the forms passed down by tradition. In the *Confucian Dialogues* we read:

The Shao melodies and dances should be taken as an example for music. The melodies from Zheng should be rejected and flatterers should be avoided as the melodies from Zheng are debauched and flatterers are dangerous.¹⁴

From the Confucian opinion on the melodies from Zheng, we may think they were licentious in some way although the phrase "immoral" would be closer to the Chinese meaning of the word *yin*. It is impossible, though, to find any fragments that would be at all erotic in the works preserved in the *Book of Songs* and coming from Zheng. Confucius was probably shocked at the deviation from moral norms that were socially accepted in the other small kingdoms belonging to what was then Chinese civilization.

Although rather superficially, we would like to conclude the above discussion on Confucius' attitude towards music and music shows with an interesting event taken from the life of the Chinese thinker that proves his uncompromising attitude to unorthodox performances as well as towards the actors taking part in them. This event was described in an old historical chronicle.¹⁵ When Confucius held the position of master of ceremonies at the court of Prince Ding from Lu, he went, one year, to the place of Jia-gu with the prince's retinue to conduct talks with Prince Jing, the ruler of the neighbouring kingdom, Qi. After the welcoming ceremony, Prince Jing, allegedly in honour of Prince Ding, ordered the preparation of a fantastic ballet performance that nobody had ever seen before. The actors, who were to perform a barbarian dance, ran into the room. The dull beating of drums could be heard from under the floor and the actors already in front to the prince were joined by a large group of warriors dressed up as barbarians. They held long spears and shields tightly in their hands and let out long drawn out war cries. In a frenzy they danced round the room like a swarm of wasps. The ruler of Lu turned pale with fright. At that moment, though, Confucius ran up to Prince Jing and ordered the removal of the so-called dancers from the room. In actual fact, the spectacle was part of a plot, thwarted by Confucius, to frighten Prince Ding with the help of "dancing barbarians" and then to seize and force him to certain concessions.

¹⁴ *Lun-yu*, p. 71.

¹⁵ Si-ma Qian, *Shi-ji*, p. 1925; also in Li Chang-zhi, *Kong-zi-di gu-shi* (A Story about Confucius), Shanghai 1957, p. 34.

After the unsuccessful ballet, Prince Jing invited his guest to a banquet. A group of court singers entered and, in order to add splendour to the occasion, started singing: *Beautiful girls love the knights from Qi*. Over ten wonderfully dressed artists, with powder and lipstick on their faces, started to dance and sing before the platform on which the princes sat. Confucius understood the words of the song to be offensive towards his ruler and when his protests brought no effect on the part of their host, he jumped up and called out:

The kingdoms of Qi and Lu live in mutual respect and peace having negotiated an agreement of friendship. The result of this is that the highest judge of the kingdom of Lu is equal to the judge from the kingdom of Qi. That is why I'll permit myself to take his place seeing he's not here.

Having said this, he walked up to the window and asked for two generals from the kingdom of Lu. Both of them appeared in the room immediately and, on his order, led the two main actors out for execution. The others, trembling with fright, ran away in a panic.

Confucius saved the Prince of Lu's prestige in this way but the two poor singers, who had lost their heads for acting on their ruler's orders, were hardly to be blamed.

As it can be seen on the basis of the above mentioned event, the times in which the most famous creators of Chinese thought lived and worked were anything but peaceful. One could often lose one's life for breaking the most insignificant rule of etiquette. It is possible to conclude, on the basis of the strict principles concerning the way ancient Chinese music was performed, and which were adhered to even before the times of Confucius who only codified them in the now lost *Book of Music*, that the occupation of a musician, singer, dancer or actor was definitely dangerous. Also many other types of work, especially those that required direct contact with the different rival groups within the ruling class, were dangerous as far as one's life was concerned.

The second great Chinese philosophical system, known as Taoism, probably came into being in order to give human life as much security as possible in the face of so much danger caused by social struggle and friction in that stormy epoch. Its semi-legendary founder, Lao-zi was an older contemporary of Confucius. He lived and worked in the 6th c. B.C. leaving behind him a collection of aphoristic maxims, *Dao-de-jing* (*The Path to Virtue*) which is a work acknowledged by certain researchers as having been written a few centuries later. Lao-zi, as well as other later Taoists such as Zhuang-zi, Han Fei-zi, Huai-nan-zi, devoted very little space to music and performances although from the few statements preserved and by taking their whole philosophical system into account, we have to state they were fanatically opposed towards those Confucian forms of art as well as towards any other form of imitating nature artificially. (In certain European languages we have the lucky

derivative of the terms: sztuka — sztuczny, art — artificial).

Thus now our thoughts will be concerned with a specific type of negative theatrical reflection, i.e. a reflection negating the human need for the existence of music and spectacles, and even pointing to the harm they may cause.

The Taoists (I am keeping to the traditional spelling here although the form Daoists should be used according to the new principles), like the Confucians, represented the view that music originated from human desires, being their expression at the same time. Great attention was paid both to the shaping and the development of man's natural features by man himself. In a way, they were trying to connect him to nature and to immerse him in it although they were also decidedly against limiting nature by man in any way. They believed the renouncing of any desires and goals to be the basic condition for success in the process of shaping human nature.

In *The Path to Virtue* the following aphorisms can be found:

By not presenting desirous objects, the hearts of the people will not be moved.¹⁶

Five colours make people blind,

Five sounds make people deaf,

Five tastes make people's palate grow numb.

That is why a Man of Wisdom is concerned with what is worthy of his insides (his belly) and not with what attracts his sight only (his eyes).¹⁷

There is no greater unhappiness than the lack of restraint.

There is no greater offence than desire to achieve something.

That is why satiety based on the knowledge of restraint is lasting satiety.¹⁸

There is no greater crime than that of possessing desires. (Han-fei-zi, the chapter Jie-Lao, Explanations of the teachings of Lao-zi).¹⁹

From among the ten offences a Taoist should avoid, Han-fei-zi mentions two that are concerned with our subject:

...Four. If (man) does not deal in government affairs but enjoys the five tones (i.e. music based on the pentatonic scale), he will drive himself to death... Six: If he devotes all his time to women and music and not to matters of state, he will lead his country to ruin.²⁰

As it can be seen from the above quotations, the creators of original classical Taoism believed that musical works, songs and spectacles were the expression of goals and human desires which they tried to rid themselves of in order to achieve complete harmony with nature. At the same time, musical compositions as conscious and meaningful creations of human activity were something artificial which, ex definitione, tore

¹⁶ Lao-zi, *Dao-de-jing*, ed. Si-bu cong-kan, Shanghai 1936, vol. 122, p. 4.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹⁹ Han Fei-zi, ed. Si-bu cong-kan, Shanghai 1936, vol. 79, p. 31.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

man away from his needs dictated to him by his nature. Sounds artificially put together, according to principles set down by the rules of ritual, created melodies that were foreign to human nature and limited its free development through those principles of composition. That is why Lao-zi stresses the fact that "five sounds make people deaf." They are not just any sounds that would suit human nature, but the five "whose absolute height was calculated exactly and set down so that each one of them had a clearly defined ritual function". According to the Confucians, breaking those principles in the field of sound arrangement in a musical composition and then performing it led, in a magical way, to a breach in society's moral state, and even to the appearance of harmful climatic phenomena. In the eyes of the Taoists, on the other hand, those principles were ties impeding man's freedom in revealing his nature.

During Lao-zi's times, the Taoists even believed serving at court to be an occupation restricting their nature and that is why the majority of them led the life of hermits. As it can be seen from what Han-fei-zi said (he lived in the third century B.C. and was, to a certain extent, under the influence of both the Confucian and legalist philosophies) he permitted the believers in Taoism to hold government and administrative posts but always stressed the great harmfulness of dealing with music and shows, especially those performed by attractive female dancers, for man himself and his country.

The Taoists very definitely overthrew every form of music that was the result of a meaningful, ritual arrangement of sounds as well as those that revealed or brought forth certain desires. They did, however, permit the possibility of singing, or rather humming melodies without words as a spontaneous act coming from man's nature in certain emotional situations. An example of such Taoistic singing can be found in the work of *Zhuang-zi*, a Taoist philosopher from the turn of the 4th and 3rd c. B.C. In Chapter XVIII of that book there is the following anecdote:

Master Huei visited master Zhuang when the latter's wife died in order to offer his condolences. He found master Zhuang sitting with his legs spread wide apart beating on a bowl and singing. Master Huei said: As (your wife) lived with you, grew old bringing up your children and died, wouldn't your lack of tears (after her death) be enough (to show your indifference towards her)? But (at such a time) to beat on a bowl and sing—isn't that going a little too far? Master Zhuang answered: It is not so...²¹

and continued to explain why he was not crying over her death, leaving the fact of "beating on a bowl and singing" without an explanation. This was probably a Taoistic impulse that was in accordance with his

²¹ Zhuang-zi, *Nan-hua zhen-jing*, ed. Si-bu cong-kan, Shanghai, 1936, vol. 123, pp. 129—130.

individual nature although it did amaze master Huei, another Taoist. On the basis of this fragment one may come to the conclusion that Taoists allowed for the existence of individual forms of human nature within the rules of nature in general.

In a presentation on theatrical thought in ancient China we cannot omit the views of Mo Di, a philosopher and founder of a school in the 5th c. B.C. It was sometimes called the Moist school or the school of altruists. Mo Di's theatrical reflection, as well as his views on music and the way it was put into practice, was also negative in character although his reasons were different to those of the Taoists. Mo Di's philosophy was, to a great extent, utilitarian and that is why he treated every type of human activity that did not bring definite material profit as being of no value whatsoever, and of even being harmful. He presented his views on music and music shows in one (of the three) chapters still preserved entitled "The Negation of Music" (*Fei-yue*):

According to Mo Di, three matters should take up the time of the people. They should think and do everything in order to feed the hungry, to clothe those suffering from the cold and to assure the possibility of having a rest to those in need of it. By presenting music shows it is not possible, though, to help people in those three matters and to remove those three types of illfortune...²²

Nowadays rulers order the building of (costly) musical instruments as part of state organized ventures. It is not as easy to build them as to vaporize water or to dig a hole. Because of this, it is necessary to impose taxes on the people in order to acquire the ring of a great bell, the sounds of drums, and those of the qiu, shi, yu and sheng instruments. Wise ancient rulers did in fact impose taxes on the people for the building of boats and vehicles. But when the work was completed and the people asked: 'What use are we going to have from them?'—they could answer: 'The boats will be used on the water and the vehicles on land so that the nobleman may give his feet a rest and the peasant may rest his arms and shoulders'. The people gave money for this cause and did not dare say anything. This was because boats and vehicles brought profit to the people. If musical instruments were also to bring people profit, I would not dare condemn them...²³

Mo Di saw the harmfulness in making music and organizing music shows in the fact that people were drawn away from productive work.

When rulers look down from the height of the great towers (of their palace), the bell for them is similar to a tripod upside down. Where would enjoyment come from if the bell was not rung? That is why it has to be rung. Of course, old people and children cannot be employed for this job as neither their sight nor their hearing is sharp enough, their arms are not strong and they are not capable of obtaining sounds from the bell that would be harmonious and of varied expression. That is why people who are in the prime of life, who have sharp sight and hearing, strong arms and voices that are harmonious and of varied expression are taken for this. If, for this

²² *Mo-zi*, ed. Si-bu cong-kan, Shanghai 1936, vol. 93, p. 72.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

music, one takes men and their ploughing and sowing are neglected. If one takes women, they will be disturbed in their spinning and weaving. Thus rulers, by devoting much attention to music shows, deprive people of food and clothes...²⁴

In the past, Prince Kang from Qi (404–379 B.C.) loved music and dance shows. The dancers, though, could not dress in costumes made from rough linen and feed on husks and oats (i.e. food of lower quality). If their feeding were not of the best, their appearance and complexion would not make a pleasant impression. If their costumes were also not elegant, their bodies and dance movement would not bring joy. That is why their food must be made from the best grain and meat, and their costumes from silk, richly embroidered. The performers of music and dance shows do not work at making their own clothes and at preparing food, but they live all the time at the cost of other people's work. That is why master Mo said: At present, rulers are concerned with spectacles and because of this, they deprive people of the possibility of producing food and clothing. So it is not right to develop this type of entertainment.²⁵

According to Mo Di, watching this type of entertainment was also a complete waste of time, causing harm to the duties lying on the different social classes. In the same chapter entitled "Negation of Music" he wrote:

As listening to music and watching shows in solitude does not give much pleasure, rulers would have to enjoy them together with the simple folk or with state dignitaries. In the former case, this would hinder people in their work on the land while in the latter, it would draw civil servants away from their duties. Thus cultivating this type of entertainment is absolutely inappropriate.²⁶

Summing up the above thoughts of Mo Di on the subject of the social harmfulness of making music and organizing music shows, we may express the causes leading him to such a negative opinion in three points:

1. The building of musical instruments is expensive and requires imposing taxes on people which could be used better for the people.
2. Presenting music shows requires the means and people's time which could be used better if devoted to productive work.
3. The audience of such performances also waste their time while watching them.

Mo Di concludes his deliberations on music with the following statement:

A Noble-minded person, who really wishes to be of use to the world and wishes to destroy the ill-fortune oppressing it, must definitely order the end of such things as music.²⁷

Our discussion on theatrical reflection in ancient China should be completed with the opinions on yet one more type of performance. I am

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

concerned here with the Shamanistic dances and ceremonies which were quite widespread in those times. They formed a separate type of spectacle and were fought against by orthodox Confucians. Due to this, it is more difficult to find any deeper thoughts and generalization on the subject of the role and meaning of this type of performance in Chinese literature that is full of Confucian thought.

While summing up the discussion on the beginnings of theatrical reflections in ancient China and comparing them with the analogical problem within European culture, certain conclusions of a more general kind come to mind. Among other things, in connection with the rather late development of drama forms in China, in comparison with the Greek and Roman world, the beginnings of reflections on matters concerning the theatre are devoted to performances that are musical and choreographical. In Aristotle's *Poetics*, for example, the theatre is only mentioned occasionally or in connection with drama. It is also worth pointing to the fact that deliberations on the theatre in China present a much stronger connection between the theatre and etiquette, or even ritual, than with poetry as it was in Greek discussions on the theatre. Finally, it is also worth stressing that whereas western treatment of theatrical matters as a discipline did not in actual fact start until the 20th century, in China, as it can be seen from the above review, it already took shape from the 6th c. B.C. to the 1st c. A.D.

Translated by *Aniela Korzeniowska*

POCZĄTKI REFLEKSJI TEATRALNEJ W CHINACH

STRESZCZENIE

W blisko trzydziestowiekowych dziejach chińskiej literatury pierwsze utwory dramatyczne pojawiły się dopiero na przełomie XIII i XIV wieku, jednak znacznie wcześniej, nawet w czasach na poły legendarnych istniały różnego rodzaju widowiska, uważane przez wielu badaczy za pierwowidy teatru chińskiego. Muzyka, śpiew i taniec były zasadniczymi składnikami najwcześniejszych widowisk w Chinach i refleksja teatralna tych właśnie komponentów dotyczyła.

W okresie dynastii Zhou 1025—221 r. p.n.e. i w czasach wcześniejszych stosowano dwa terminy na określenie widowisk: *yue* i *xi*. Pierwszy z nich oznaczał pierwotnie strunowy instrument muzyczny, a więc muzyka była elementem najbardziej w tego rodzaju widowiskach eksponowanym. Drugi termin oznaczał pewien rodzaj bronii, toteż widowiska określane tym terminem zawierały wiele elementów walki, zmagania.

Traktat *Lü-shi chun-qu* z końca III w. p.n.e. zawiera refleksję o widowiskach w czasach legendarnych władców Chin. Ukazuje sytuacje w jakich te widowiska powstawały i rozważa cele, jakim miały służyć. Przeważnie celem widowisk było upamiętnienie czynów władcy.

Poczynając od schyłku VI w. p.n.e. znajdujemy rozproszone ślady refleksji na temat widowisk muzycznych w pismach niektórych myślicieli złotego okresu

filozofii chińskiej. Konfucjusz, założyciel głównego chińskiego systemu światopoglądowego, konfucjanizmu, widział w muzyce i widowiskach muzycznych ważny czynnik jednoczący i harmonizujący współdziałanie ludzi w społeczeństwie. Widowiska spełniały funkcję rytualną i magiczną, a więc tylko właściwy ich dobór i wykonanie zyskiwały aprobatę Konfucjusza. Taoiści Lao-zi i Zhuang-zi, wychodząc z założenia, że muzyka i widowiska są uzewnętrznieniem ludzkich pragnień, zasadniczo negowali potrzebę jednych i drugich dla osiągnięcia przez człowieka doskonałości w stopieniu się z naturą. Mieli, oczywiście, na myśli muzykę i widowiska rytualne, propagowane przez konfucjanistów. Założyciel znanej szkoły moistów, filozof Mo Di, wykazywał wręcz szkodliwość widowisk teatralnych jako stratę środków materialnych i czasu, które mogłyby być wykorzystane dla konkretnych zajęć produkcyjnych, dzięki którym można by było nakarmić zgłodniałych, odziać zziębniętych i zapewnić odpoczynek strudzonym.

Tadeusz Żbikowski