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### Some Allusions to Zeal in Study in the Ming Drama

Studies of the Chinese drama and its history had been neglected in China, and especially in western countries, until very recent times. It is true that some works on the Chinese drama (S. Julien and A. Bazin) as well as some translations of plays appeared in the 19th century, but still interest in the Chinese drama was not great enough to give rise to more numerous translations or to the compiling of dictionaries and other reference works, for all of which there was a growing demand. Even a beginner in Chinese literature notices that while there are translations of classical Chinese literature into many languages, and numerous reference works, such as vocabularies, dictionaries, concordances and commentaries, published by both Chinese and European scholars, studies in dramatic works, especially of the Ming period (some works on the Yüan drama have appeared since 1956 in connection with Kuan Han-ch'ing's anniversary) are scanty, or even, in some cases, non-existent.

In spite of the relatively good transmission of some of the dramatic texts of the Ming period, they present a good deal of difficulties to their students and translators, difficulties quite different from those encountered in classical literature. The difficulties are due mainly to the allusive and metaphorical character of these texts, and to my knowledge there have been as yet no dependable dictionaries explaining such allusions and metaphors. As the Yüan dramas were largely composed in the colloquial language of that period, during the Ming time, especially after the rise of the so-called *k'un-ch'ü* 崑曲 style, it became a fashion to write plays in a most elaborate way in order to display one's erudition by using many allusions and metaphors, which could be understood only by the playwrights themselves or by a small group of scholars who belonged to the same literary society as the author. Probably the only work on allusions in Chinese is *Allusions Littéraires* by Corentin Pétillon, published in Shanghai in 1909—10, and even this work contains mainly allusions used in classical literature. Some metaphorical and allusive expressions are also explained in certain Chinese and bilingual dictionaries, such as the *Han-yü tz'u-tien* 漢語詞典, Mathews's *Chinese-English Dictionary*, Giles's *Chinese-English Dictionary*, etc., but these include only a small number of such expressions and in only one form, whereas, as we shall see below, an allusive expression may be formulated in many ways.

Of all the rhetorical tropes used in the Ming plays allusion is most difficult to understand, since it is not always clear what impression should be evoked in the reader's mind, and the primary meaning of the allusive word may convey nothing to the reader, as it has nothing in common with the text in which it is inserted. These allusions may refer either to somebody's statement or to some event, and the person who uttered the word or who took part in the event is, as a rule, not mentioned. Both forms of allusion are difficult to understand unless the reader knows the original event or the circumstances in which the allusive words were uttered.

Five allusions to zeal in study will be discussed in this paper. The examples have been taken from a collection of Ming plays, the *Liu-shih-chung ch'ü* 六十種曲 compiled by Mao Chin 毛晉. The edition of *Wen-hsüeh ku-chi-k'an hsing-she* 文學古籍刊行社 of 1955 has been used, and the place where the quotation can be found will be indicated thus: first the title of the play, and then the number of the volume, the number of the scene or act, and the number of the line (including the line of the title). The five allusive expressions studied are:

1. *ying-hsüeh* 映雪 "reflection from the snow";
2. *nang-ying* 囊螢 "keeping fireflies in a bag";
3. *tso-pi* 鑿壁 "boring through a wall";
4. *hsüan-liang* 懸梁 "suspending oneself from the beam";
5. *tz'u-ku* 刺股 "pricking the thigh (with an awl)".

The first allusion is well exemplified by the following sentence:

1) 十年映雪圖南運 *shih-nien ying-hsüeh t'u-nan-yün* "...for ten years in reflections from the snow I sketched the plans of the southern revolving sphere". (*Tzu-ch'ai chi*, vol. IV. act. 2, l. 2.). The phrase "...for ten years in reflections from the snow", does not convey the proper meaning of the sentence to the reader who is not familiar with the story, or rather the biographical note about Sun K'ang, preserved in the T'ang anthology, the *I-wen lei-chü*. "The Classified Compilation of Art and Literature". The story runs as follows: "The family of Sun K'ang was so poor that he had to use the reflection from the snow as the source of light when studying; subtle and aloof, he did not mingle with society". Thus the sentence quoted above means that the hero of the play, in spite of his poverty, studied with zeal for ten years, sketching the southern revolving sphere.

The second allusion is represented by a number of examples in Ming plays:

2) 且玩螢囊蠹簡 *ch'ieh wan ying-nang ts'an-chien*. "...And so I toyed with a bag of fireflies over the tablets eaten by bookworms". (*Ming-chu chi*, vol. III, act. 9. l. 6.);

3) 展秋牕腐草無螢火 *chan-ch'iu-ch'uang fou-ts'ao wu ying-huo*. "I open the window into the autumn, but amidst the decayed grass there is no light of fireflies". (*Han-tan chi*, vol. IV. act. 2. l. 3.);

<sup>1</sup> Ou-yang Hsün 歐陽詢, *I-wen lei-chü* 藝文類聚, ed. Chung-hua shu-chü, Shanghai 1959, chüan 2. p. 2. verso. l. 4—5.

4) 蠹簡螢窗莫憚勞 *ts'an-chien ying-ch'uang mo-tan-lao* "(Examining) the bookworm-eaten tablets at the firefly-window I did not shrink from hard study". (*Yü-chüeh chi*, vol. IX, act. 2, l. 20.);

5) 點蠅頭鼯勉囊螢 *tien ying-t'ou min-mien nang-ying*. "...Writing (characters as small as) the head of a fly, I exerted myself gathering fireflies into a bag". (*Chin-lien chi*, vol. VI, act. 31, l. 16—17.);

6) 向螢閣研究囊篇殘卷 *hsiang ying-ko yen-chiu nang-p'ien ts'an-chüan*. "I went to the firefly pavilion to examine and study the old texts damaged by bookworms". (*Ssu-hsi chi*, vol. VI, act. 2, l. 30.);

7) 十載螢窗 *shih-tsai ying-ch'uang*. "I spent ten years at the firefly window". (*Ssu-hsi chi*, vol. VI, act. 16, l. 8.).

In the above examples we can see that the same allusion may be expressed in different ways, as for instance: *ying-nang* "the bag of fireflies", *ying-huo* "the light of fireflies", *ying-ch'uang* "the firefly-window", *nang-ying* "gathering fireflies into a bag", and *ying-ko* "the firefly-pavilion". It is true that no dictionary can list all the possible expressions concerning one allusion, therefore to read Ming plays one must know many allusions, or at least those most commonly used. This is true of almost every allusion, and although only one example of *ying-hsüeh* 映雪 "reflections from the snow" was given above, other modifications of this, like *hsüeh-an* 雪案 "the snowy desk", or *hsüeh-ch'uang* 雪窗 "the snowy window", will be explained in greater detail.

The sources for the allusion to the gathering fireflies into a bag can be found at least in two texts: in the *Chin-shu*<sup>2</sup> 晉書 there is a biography of a student who could not afford oil for his lamp and was the first to use the light of fireflies instead. The *Chin-shu* states the following: "Ch'ü Yin, styled Wu-tzu, studied with zeal in his youth; his family being poor, he had no lamp, therefore in summer he gathered fireflies to light his books with, while in the winter he gathered snow. Later on he held the office of *ssu-t'u*".

The anthology *I-wen lei-chü*<sup>3</sup> quoting the lost work *Hsü Chin yang-ch'iu* 續晉陽秋 says: "Ch'ü Yin, styled Wu-tzu, was never tired of study. His family was so poor that they did not always have oil for lamps. In summer months he took a basket and filled it with scores of fireflies. He used their light, so that at night the sun did not set for him".

This is another example of the great zeal of a poor student who, being very anxious to learn even after the sunset, made use of fireflies to light his studies. Thus most of those expressions in the Ming plays which contain the word *ying* "firefly" as a component may refer to this story implying the hero's zeal to study. Without the

<sup>2</sup> Fang Hsüan-ling 房玄齡, *Chin-shu* 晉書, ed. Pona-pen, chüan 83, p. 5396.

<sup>3</sup> Ou-yang Hsün 歐陽詢 *I-wen lei-chü* 藝文類聚 ed. cit. chüan 97, p. 8, recto, l. 8—9.

knowledge of the story which underlies this allusion it may be quite impossible to understand the meaning of the text.

The allusion to "boring through the wall" was just as popular and well-known as the allusion to fireflies mentioned above. The examples found in the *Liu-shih-chung ch'ü* are as follows:

8) 能鑿壁 *neng tso-pi* "...I can chisel through the wall". (*Huan-hun chi*, vol. IV. act. 2. 1. 4.);

9) 鑿壁且偷光 *tso-pi ch'ieh t'ou-kuang*. "I bored through the wall to steal the light". (*Hsiang-nang chi*, vol. I. act. 3., l. 21—22.);

10) 刮垢磨光 *kua-kou mo-kuang* "I scraped off the dirt (of the wall) and bored through it to get the light". (*Shuang-chu chi*, vol. XII, act. 2. 1. 5.).

There are several sources which might supply the answer to this allusion, yet the oldest seems to be that of the *Han-shu*, while the longest is that of *Hsi-ching tsa-chi* 西京雜記.

The corresponding passage in the *Han-shu*<sup>4</sup> is: "K'uang Heng bored through the wall to draw his neighbour's light and to read books at the hole". The story in the *Hsi-ching tsa-chi*<sup>5</sup> "Various Notes on the Western Capital" is much longer and more detailed. It runs as follows:

"K'uang Heng, styled Chih-kuei, studied with zeal but had no candle. His neighbour had a candle, but Heng could not make use of it. So he made a hole in the partition-wall to get his neighbour's light. Then taking up his books, he made the light fall on them (so that he could) read them. In that district there was a man of a powerful family; he could neither read nor write, but his family owned a great number of books. Heng let himself be employed by him and did not ask a fee. His master was surprised and asked him why (he did so). Heng said: 'I wish to get my master's books and to read them all'. His master sighed with emotion and gave him the books for wages. Consequently, Heng gained great knowledge. Heng could comment on poetry and people of his time said about him: 'When no one can explain poetry, then K'uang Ting turns up, and when K'uang Ting explains poetry, all men smile'. 'Ting' was Heng's childname. The people of his time were frightened of contradicting him. His listeners all smiled and laughed heartily. Among the people of the district there was one who used to comment on poetry. Heng went to him to discuss with him variants and doubtful passages. The man of the district was so humiliated by Heng that he was in a great hurry to leave. Heng chased him calling: 'Oh, sir, stop and listen to the Hsia theories and former discussions of them'. The man of the district answered: 'That's enough of that', and went away not to return".

This story supplied another form of allusion to zeal in study, and all the hardships a student of a poor family had to face in order to attain a social position and to gain extensive knowledge.

<sup>4</sup> Pan Ku 班固, *Han-shu* 漢書, ed. K'ai-ming shu-tien, chüan 81, p. 0561.1.

<sup>5</sup> Wu Chün 吳均, *Hsi-ching tsa-chi* 西京雜記, ed. Ssu-pu ts'ung-k'an, chüan 2, p. 7. l. 11—19.

The other two allusions to zeal in study are also quite often found in the texts of the Ming plays. Yet they mostly appear in pairs, so that more examples of them will be analysed in the last part of this paper.

Another allusion to zeal in study is well represented by the following short phrase:

11) 會懸梁 *hui hsüan-liang* "I can suspend myself from the beam". (*Huan-hun chi*, vol. IV. act. 2 l. 4—5.).

As is clearly explained by a passage in the *Hou-Han-shu*, it has nothing to do with hanging oneself from the beam. It says: "Sun Ching 孫敬, styled Wen-chih 文質, was very fond of studying; closing up his house he read books. But he could not help falling asleep, so taking a piece of string he attached his hair by it to the roof-beam. People called him *Pi-hu hsien-sheng* 閉戶先生 or 'The Master of the Closed Door'".

This story tells us about a young man who studied with such a zeal that, being afraid of falling asleep, he attached his hair to a string suspended from the roof-beam. When he became drowsy and his head dropped forward, the pain of his hair pulled by the string woke him again.

The last of the cases of zealous students to be discussed here is supplied by a well-known statesman of the Warring States period, Su Ch'in 蘇秦. The corresponding passage in the *Chan-kuo-ts'e*<sup>6</sup> says: (Su Ch'in) brought out scores of his books and book-boxes at night; he got hold of 'The Secret Plans of the Great Master'. Bowing, he recited it. Then selecting the tablets one after the other he considered them till they were thoroughly examined. While reading, he became sleepy, so he took an awl and pricked his thigh with it; the blood flowed down to his feet".

This is another example of hard study, and at least two independent examples alluding to this event may be quoted from the Ming plays:

12) 你刺血寫經 *ni tz'u-hsieh hsieh-ching*. "Pricking yourself till the blood comes, study the classics" (*Hsin-ch'in chi*, vol. I. act. 31. l. 8, 10, 12.);

13) 慇懃上書投刺 *ying-ch'in shang-shu t'ou-tz'u*. "...with great zeal I attended to my studies, submitting myself to pricking (my thigh)". (*Chin-chioh chi*, vol. VIII, act. 16. l. 15.).

The fact that some allusive expressions were matched in pairs sometimes makes their deciphering easier; thus even if the meaning of only one part of the double allusion is known, the meaning of the other part can be surmised from it. Most of the five allusions mentioned above also happen to be used in pairs. And we can see that there existed a tendency for some allusions constantly to be matched in pairs, so that the following combinations of the five kinds of allusion mentioned above are found: 1—2, 2—3, 3—4, 4—5. Below are the examples of the double allusions found in the *Liu-shih-chung ch'ü* collection of Ming plays:

The combination of allusions 1 and 2:

14) 不思映雪與囊螢 *pu-ssu ying-hsüeh yü nang-ying*. "...I did not think of

<sup>6</sup> *Chan-kuo-ts'e* 戰國策, ed. *Ssu-pu ts'ung-k'an*, chüan 3. p. 31.

reflecting light from the snow and of gathering fireflies into a bag". (I did not care to study hard). (*Yü-huan chi*, vol. VIII, act. 15. 1. 66.);

15) 埋頭雪案螢窗 *mai-t'ou hsüeh-an ying-ch'uang*. "...I buried myself at the snowy desk by the firefly-window". (I studied very hard). (*Hsiu-ju chi*, vol. VII, act. 2. 1. 11.);

16) 十年映雪囊螢苦學干祿 *shih-nien ying-hsüeh nang-ying k'u-hsüeh kan-lu*. "For ten years of reflecting light from the snow and keeping fireflies in a bag I studied hard seeking official emolument". (For ten years I learned hard to become an official). (*Yu-kuei chi*, vol. III, act. 1. 2.);

17) 先受了雪窗螢火多年男兒志空雕蟲篆刻綴簡殘編 *hsien shou-liao hsüeh-ch'uang ying-huo to-nien, nan-erh chih k'ung tiao-ch'ung chüan-k'o to chien ts'an-p'ien*. "Formerly, I spent many years at the snowy window and in the light of fireflies. In spite of my manly determination, in vain I carved the small characters of the ancient script and collected the fragments of old texts". (I studied hard for ten years, but all my study was in vain.). (*Nan-hsi-hsiang chi*, vol. III, act. 2. 1. 3.);

18) 儻勞形雪案苦志螢囊 *chin-lao hsing hsüeh-an, k'u-chih ying-nang*. "My appearance shows a complete weariness of sitting at the snowy desk; with bitter and toilsome determination I cling to the bag of fireflies". (I am completely exhausted by my hard study, and yet I continue to study). (*Hsiang-nang chi*, vol. I, act. 3. 1. 50.);

19) 先受了雪窗螢火二十年 *hsien shou-liao hsüeh-ch'uang ying-huo erh-shih-nien*. "Formerly, I suffered twenty years of the snowy window and the light of fireflies". (I learned hard in poverty for twenty years). (*Nan-hsi-hsiang chi*, vol. III, act. 2. 1. 22.).

Sometimes this combination of allusions is used in the inverted order of 2 and 1, thus:

20) 青燈黃卷螢窗雪案 *ch'ing-teng huang-chüan ying-ch'uang hsüeh-an*. "A blue lamp over yellowish rolls of books at the firefly window and the snowy desk". (I learned hard over old books day and night). (*Nan-hsi-hsiang chi*, vol. III, act. 2. 1. 20.);

21) 螢窗苦勉旃雪案費精研 *ying-ch'uang k'u mien-chan, hsüeh-an fei ching-yen*. "At the firefly window I exert myself studying and at the snowy desk I expend my energy on scholarly investigation". (I study hard in poor conditions). (*Hsiang-nang chi*, vol. I, act. 6. 1. 24.);

22) 那時節喜十年雪案螢囊 *na-shih-chieh hsi shih-nien hsüeh-an ying-nang*. "At that time I enjoyed ten years of the snowy desk and of the firefly-bag". (Then I enjoyed ten years of hard study.). (*Hsiang-nang chi*, vol. I, act. 2. 1. 24.).

The combination of allusions 2 and 3 is represented by the following two examples:

23) 聚螢鑿壁真堪敬 *chü-ying tso-pi chen k'an-ching* "Gathering fireflies and boring through the wall is really a worthy and admirable activity". (It is really admirable to study hard). (*Ching-ch'ai chi*, vol. I, act. 6. 1. 20.);

24) 無螢鑿遍了鄰家壁 *wu-ying tso-pien-liao lin-chia pi* "As there were no fireflies I pierced my neighbour's wall". (In spite of poor conditions I did my best to study hard). (*Huan-hun chi*, vol. IV, act. 2. 1. 19.).

The combination of the allusions 3 and 4 is represented by the following example:

25) 淑諸人鑿壁懸梁 *shu-chu-jen tso-pi hsüan-liang* "All modest men bored through the wall and suspended themselves from the beam". (All modest men studied hard although living in poor conditions). (*Hsiu-ju chi*, vol. VII, act. 2. 1. 19.).

There is also an example of the combination of allusions 4 and 5 and two examples of the inverted combination of 5 and 4:

26) 更須學懸梁刺股 *keng hsü hsüeh hsüan-liang tz'u-ku*. "Moreover I must practise suspending myself from the beam and pricking my thigh". (I must study hard). (*Ssu-hsi chi*, vol. VI, act. 3. 1. 14—5).

27) 刺股懸梁志亦堅 *tz'u-ku hsüan-liang chih i chien*. "My determination to prick my thigh and to suspend myself from the beam is very strong". (I am determined to study hard). (*Hsiang-nang chi*, vol. I, act. 3. 1. 2.);

28) 從今後刺股懸梁 *ts'ung-chin-hou tz'u-ku hsüan-liang* "From now on I will prick my thigh and suspend myself from the beam". (From now on I will study hard). (*Hsi-lou chi*, vol. VIII, act. 4. 1. 42—43.).

Of course, the allusions discussed above do not exhaust the list of all allusions to zeal in study, but they are those most frequently found in the Ming plays. Other allusions, or sometimes plain self-explanatory formulations, like "to read books so much that the binding-strings are broken" or "to write so much that the inkstone is rubbed through", can also be found in the plays.

The aim of this paper is to draw attention to allusions in the Ming dramas which are often neglected in the study of these dramas.