REFLECTIONS ON SOME YUAN TSA-CHÜ

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How do you hang somebody up on the stage? This question has continued to puzzle me since I first observed, in my reading of Yuan drama, that in three of the plays there are specific directions that a character should be strung up and then later taken down. Moreover, in two of these plays it is not an expendable clown or acrobat who is maltreated in this way, but the principal male actor, the *cheng-mo*,[1] who is obliged to sing one or more arias while in this uncomfortable predicament; and in one of them he is strung up not once but twice, in different parts of the play.

My first example is from *Chin ch'ien chi* (No. 2).[2] The gold pieces of the title are fifty *K'ai-yuan t'ung-pao* coins which were given by the T'ang emperor to Wang Fu, prefect of Ch'ang-an, as a souvenir, and passed on by him to his daughter Liu-mei-erh to carry as a good luck charm. Sent on a rare outing with her maid to see the peonies in the Chiu-lung-ch'ih Gardens, she falls in love with the young poet Han Fei-ch'ing, whom she sees in the crowd, and can think of no better way of communicating her love than by dropping the family heirloom on the ground where he can pick it up. Han Fei-ch'ing is a young man of great promise who has just passed his examinations and is already on familiar terms with Ho Chih-chang and the poet Li Po. In fact, he had just been drinking with Ho Chih-chang on the occasion of his encounter with Liu-mei-erh in the park, and is rather the worse for drink when he trails her to her house and blunders into the Wang family garden. There he is apprehended by a servant and eventually confronted by the irate father himself, who, failing to get any sense out of him, gives orders for him to be trussed and strung up: "Chang Ch'ien, string this fellow up for me! When he sobers up, we can question him at leisure."

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[1] 正末.

[2] 金錢記. The numbers used throughout this article are those of William Hu's Bibliography in Crump and Hu, *Occasional Papers* 1, Center for Chinese Studies, Michigan University, 1962. They are arrived at by numbering the plays of *Yuan ch'ü hsuan* from 1 to 100 and those of Sui Shu-sen's *Yuan ch'ü hsuan wai pien* from 101 to 162. The "*chin ch'ien*" of the title must, I think, refer to specially minted gold coins and not simply mean "money", as it often does. Fifty copper cash would scarcely make a suitable imperial gift to a great minister, and in Act Three the coins would not be instantly recognizable by the minister as his own property if they were ordinary copper currency.

Presently Ho Chih-chang arrives on a visit and catches sight of Han Fei-ch'ing. "Good grief! How did you come to be strung up there?" he asks, and goes on to explain to Wang Fu that this is Han Fei-ch'ing whom the emperor had commended for his brilliant answers in the examination. "So this is Han Fei-ch'ing", says Wang Fu. "Quick, Chang Ch'ien, let him down again!"

Han Fei-ch'ing then becomes a tutor in the Wang household, giving infrequent lessons to Liu-mei-erh's half-witted brother. Except that he is unable to see Liu-mei-erh, all goes well until his employer Wang Fu comes to drink with him and discovers the fifty *K'ai-yuan* coins inside one of his books. This time the order to his servant is even more explicit: "String him up really high!" Once again Ho Chih-chang arrives in the nick of time to save his young friend. This time he proposes a match between Han Fei-ch'ing and Liu-mei-erh, and the young couple are united in a fourth act, into which the poet Li Po is somewhat irrelevantly dragged as a sort of second go-between.

In the second example, from the play *Ch'en-chou t'iao mi* (No. 3),[3] the great judge Pao Cheng, or Pao tai-chih as he is always called in these plays, is himself strung up by the two villains outside the inn in which they are carousing. A Ming woodcut illustration of this play shows, rather improbably, a man hung up by his wrists with his toes some five feet above the ground;[4] but play illustrations are always purely imaginary and bear little relationship to the actual performance.

In this play the powerful minister Liu Ya-nei has arranged for his son and son-in-law to be appointed commissioners for the distribution of relief grain in the famine-stricken city of Ch'en-chou. They proceed to oppress and afflict the local people by every kind of malpractice, charging double the statutory price of grain, selling short weight, and eventually murdering an old man who has the temerity to protest. The just judge Pao gets himself sent to Ch'en-chou to investigate. Sending his servant on ahead, he travels incognito and has the good fortune to fall in with the kept woman of the two villains, who is having trouble with her donkey while on her way to a rendezvous with them. He retrieves the animal and accompanies her to her meeting with the corrupt commissioners, but offends them by offering the food they give him to the donkey, and is strung up from a tree outside the tavern. Presently Pao's servant Chang Ch'ien arrives and in a boastful and self-important manner promises the villains that he will save them from his master. "My master is Judge Pao sitting", he tells them. "Judge Pao standing – that's me!" But just at that moment he catches sight of his master hung up outside and is paralyzed with fear, and his shaking limbs

[3] 陳州糶米.

[4] Reproduced in Ku Hsueh-chieh 顧學頡 *Yuan-jen tsa-chü hsuan*, Peking, 1965, on p. 507.

and pallid cheeks are described by Pao, who is singing an aria as he hangs there.

My third example comes from *Lo Li-lang* (No. 90),[5] to my mind a play of very great interest. Two impoverished scholars, Su Wen-shun and Meng Ts'ang-shih, each a young widower and each having a young child, Su a daughter called Ting-nu and Meng a son called T'ang-ko, attempt to raise money in order to pay their fares to the capital by pawning their children to their sworn brother, the wealthy weaver Lo Li-lang. Li gives them money, but insists on caring for the children as if they were his own. Twenty years later they are still living with him. He has married them to each other, and they have a child called Shou-ch'un. T'ang-ko has turned out an utter wastrel, and old Li is constantly paying his drinking and gambling debts. Li's slave Hou-hsing tells T'ang-ko that he is not Li's real son and incites him to go to the capital to look for his father, subsequently pretending to old Li that it was someone else who had informed T'ang-ko about his parentage. When sent by old Li to fetch T'ang-ko back, Hou-hsing, instead of urging him to return, gives him two counterfeit silver ingots, hoping that they will bring about his undoing. He then tells Li that T'ang-ko is dead, and when Li burns paper money for T'ang-ko's soul, pretends to be possessed and, feigning the "dead" man's voice, instructs the old man to give him half his estate and to let him have T'ang-ko's wife. When old Li feels unwell as a result of all these shocks, Hou-hsing knocks him down, seizes all the money he can lay his hands on, and rushes off, dragging Ting-nu and Shou-ch'un after him. Coming to himself, the old man realizes that he has been deceived about T'ang-ko and goes off to look for him. Finding him at last among a gang of convicts engaged in reconstruction work on the Hsiang-kuo-ssu, he buys him the post of overseer, since for the time being this is all he can do to help him. Meanwhile Su Wen-shun, who is now a great minister, has purchased a little boy – in fact his own grandchild Shou-ch'un – to carry his silver spittoon. The spittoon disappears, and Shou-ch'un is strung up for questioning. He is seen thus by T'ang-ko, who is also strung up by Su Wen-shun as a suspected receiver of stolen property. Drawn by the cries of his adopted son and grandson, Li attempts to buy their liberty, but is referred to the minister Su Wen-shun by the latter's servant. Recognition follows, and T'ang-ko is made to kowtow to this new father-in-law whom he has never known. Presently the wicked slave Hou-hsing is caught stealing a horse. The children are now reunited with their real fathers and old Li is harshly pushed aside.

I find Yen Tun-i's explanation of this play quite incredible.[6] To begin with he says, as so often, that this is not a Yuan but an early Ming play, but

[5] 羅李郎.

[6] Yen Tun-i 嚴敦易, *Yuan-chü chen i* 元劇斟疑, Peking, 1960, p. 412 *seq.*

somewhat undermines this position by at once going on to state that it represents a disguised attack on the evils of high interest money-lending and the enslavement of children in lieu of debt-interest which were current in the Yuan dynasty. He even suggests, on virtually no evidence at all, that old Li is a non-Chinese. He finds the heartless failure of the two real fathers to so much as inquire about their children during an absence of twenty years quite understandable in the light of these "facts", and regards the heartless rejection of old Li by the two children and his dejection and unhappiness at the end of the play as no less than his due.

In my view the text of the play simply will not support this interpretation. For a start, old Li, at the very outset, when he lends the money to his two sworn "brothers", insists that between friends there should be no formalities of written bonds and contracts and that he will simply care for the children on their fathers' behalf as if they were his own. The whole point of the play is that he sacrificed all he had and showed infinite resources of kindness and patience on behalf of someone else's children. The text of the play also makes it abundantly clear that in the event of his death the children were to have become his heirs. Personally I cannot see in the play anything other than an elaborate mockery of the *t'uan-yuan* convention and indeed of the whole system of beliefs and practices connected with the Chinese concept of filial piety. Because he is no blood kin, old Li's twenty years of love and care do not count. Because of the tie of blood, the twenty years of heartless neglect and the brutalities shown to the son and grandson when at last they meet the man who had abandoned them do not count. And what makes this so? The convention of the *t'uan-yuan*, the reunion of divided kin – the happy ending which audiences are supposed to demand.

For the audience this must surely have been a problem play. Old Li, after all, is the *cheng-mo*, the singer and protagonist with whom the audience is invited to identify: yet after all his kindness and all his sufferings for the two children whom he loved and cherished, they turn their backs on him. Even if it were true that old Li was a *se-mu-jen*[7] and a usurer, one would have to admit that the author's treatment of him was as ambivalent as was Shakespeare's treatment of Shylock, who was also an alien and a usurer, though one with much less of the milk of human kindness in him than Lo Li-lang.

Tsang Mou-hsün's attribution of this play to the author of *Ho han-shan* (No. 8)[8] may well be erroneous. He would appear to have associated the two plays because the full titles each contain "Hsiang-kuo-ssu",[9] the name of the temple in which the dénouement takes place. But Yen Tun-i's reason

[7] 色目人.
[8] 合汗衫.
[9] The full titles are 相國寺公子合汗衫 and 羅李郎大鬧相國寺.

for rejecting this attribution – that the playwright who had already written one play which ended with the reunion of a broken family in the Hsiang-kuo-ssu could not conceivably be the author of another play which "virtually reduplicated the same theme" – has little to recommend it.[10] Far from reproducing *Ho han-shan*, *Lo Li-lang* in fact savagely travesties all that it stands for. And while not discounting the possibility that the author of *Ho han-shan* (Chang Kuo-pao, Chang Kuo-pin or Chang k'u-p'in,[11] whichever is the correct version of his name) became so weary of the *t'uan-yuan* tradition that he deliberately set out to travesty his own work, it seems to me much more likely that some anonymous humorist resolved to write a "send-up" of *Ho han-shan*, much as Fielding wrote the humorous *Joseph Andrews* as a "send-up" of Richardson's sentimental *Pamela*, and that he deliberately used "Hsiang-kuo-ssu" in the full title and made it the scene of the dénouement as a means of showing the audience what he was up to.

There is of course the problem that the plots of Yuan *tsa-chü* are to a large extent revealed through the dialogue, the *pin-pai*,[12] which was subject to greater vicissitudes than the sung part of the text. Quite substantial changes of plot could be and in fact were sometimes introduced into a play by alterations in the *pin-pai*, so it is quite possible that these subtleties I am claiming to see in *Lo Li-lang* were introduced by producers and actors and were outside the intention of the original playwright. But these speculations must be deferred while I return for a moment to the theatrical up-stringings which are the subject of my paper. How were they achieved?

Let me say at once that I discount the possibility that they were in the first instance intended to be mimed by players standing with their hands behind them on the ground or on a table or other object placed upon the stage, though no doubt the exigencies of production would sometimes necessitate their being represented in that way, just as some Elizabethan productions of *Romeo and Juliet* must have deprived Juliet of her balcony. The deliberate and repeated introduction by playwrights of the period of so specific and spectacular a method of immobilizing a person and their so designing the dialogue that the person up-strung should in each case hang unseen during part of the scene and only be discovered later by actors on the stage must surely mean that resources existed in the Yuan theatre for producing this particular effect, just as resources existed in the classical Greek theatre for producing a *deus ex machina*, or as resources existed in the seventeenth-century European theatre for revealing Apollo and his Muses in the clouds and for similar sorts of epiphany and apotheosis.

Materials on the Yuan stage are scanty in the extreme. Foremost is the

[10] *Op. cit.*, p. 414.
[11] 張國寶, 張國賓, 張酷貧: the name appears variously in *Yüan ch'ü hsüan*, *T'ai-ho cheng yin p'u* and the T'ien-i-ko edition of *Lu kuei pu*.
[12] 賓白.

the play *Lan Ts'ai-ho* (No. 159)[13] in which the title role sung by the male lead, or *cheng-mo*, in fact represents a *cheng-mo* who owns his own troupe of actors and his own theatre in the amusement quarter of Loyang. Yen Tun-i has produced a great many reasons for making *Lan Ts'ai-ho* a post-Yuan play – some of them, such as the statement that it cannot be a Yuan play because there are no Yuan plays about actors, to my mind rather feeble ones.[14]

I am inclined to disregard Yen's disparagement of *Lan Ts'ai-ho* as historical material for two reasons. In the first place there is no reason to suppose that the fall of the Yuan dynasty was accompanied by any large-scale demolition of theatres, by the dissolution of theatrical companies, or by the introduction of new methods of staging and production; so that even if this *is* an early Ming play, it still contains valid evidence about the arrangements of the Yuan theatre. In the second place the information we can glean from *Lan Ts'ai-ho* corresponds, such as it is, with what we can learn from two other unimpeachable sources about whose early dating there can be no dispute. The first is Tu Jen-chieh's *t'ao-ch'ü* or song-sequence, on the country bumpkin's visit to the theatre, *Chuang-chia pu shih kou-lan*.[15] The other is the mural in the Kuang-sheng-ssu temple at Chao-ch'eng in Shansi depicting a troupe of actors on a stage performing a play and inscribed with the date *T'ai-ting yuan nien*=1324. The hangings, curtains, drapes and so forth parallel those referred to in the play *Lan Ts'ai-ho* and the wording on the pelmet which hangs across the whole width of the proscenium arch corresponds to the wording of the advertisement mentioned in the first act of *Lan Ts'ai-ho*.

In an article by Ch'i Kung published in *Wen-hsueh i-ch'an tseng-k'an* in 1955,[16] the author insists that the male lead represented in the centre of the group on stage and obviously the Chung-tu-hsiu of the superscription is in fact a woman. His reasons are (1) that several of the actresses listed in *Ch'ing-lou-chi*[17] have stage-names ending in "*hsiu*", and (2) that under the gentleman's robe opening to the left one can glimpse a lady's chemise opening to the right. Whether or not these are felt to be compelling reasons, it was of course not uncommon for actresses to sing the *cheng-mo* roles, and it is quite possible that the epicene *hsiao-sheng* of Peking opera is a relic of this practice, just as the contralto Orfeo and Rosenkavalier remind us that the male lead in European opera was once a castrato.

[13] 藍采和.
[14] *Yüan-chü chen-i*, p. 439 *seq.*
[15] Tu Jen-shieh 杜仁傑 (T. Shan-fu 善夫), 耍孩兒 "莊家不識构闌" in *Ch'üan Yüan san-ch'ü* 全元散曲, Peking, 1964, pp. 31–2.
[16] Ch'i Kung 啓功, "Lun Yüan-tai tsa-chü ti pan-yen wen-t'i" 論元代雜劇的扮演問題, WHIC *Tseng-k'an* 1, 1955, pp. 286–96.
[17] Eighteen entries, and more are mentioned within the text. Other sources yield further instances.

Lan Ts'ai-ho, however, was certainly a man. His wife played the *tan* parts (*i.e.* they were both singers); the *ching* parts were played by his cousins; and his children presumably played child parts when required to do so. The remarkable tolerance of the Yuan theatre for child actors, so feared and detested by professional actors in the West, was no doubt due to the fact that troupes were commonly family affairs and the child parts played by the actors' own children.

Both the play *Lan-Ts'ai-ho* and Tu Jen-chieh's *Chuang-chia pu shih kou-lan* refer to the seating plan and internal structure of a Yuan theatre. Tu Jen-chieh was a good friend of the famous Chin poet Yuan Hao-wen (1190–1257), so what he is describing belongs to the very beginning of the Yuan period. The following is a translation, somewhat tentative at times, of Tu Jen-chieh's sequence:

Fair winds and timely rain to all alike bring pleasure,
But to us farming folk in greatest measure:
Our grains and silkworms show a record yield,
And taxes for this year have been repealed.
So, having vowed a thanksgiving for the good year,
To town comes I to buy the proper gear.
And as down the city street I made by way,
I saw a red notice hanging, very bright and gay,
And a great crowd of folks thronging round it, the like of which I never saw before this day.

And I heard a man with his hand on a lath gate say,
Shouting in a great voice, "Walk up, walk up".
He says, "We shall first present the play *Village Wooing*, and for the entrée
The junior lead will enact the part of Liu Shua-ho."
"Come on", he shouts at the top of his lungs, "you can get there easy for the end, but we want you to see the play".

Well, three hundred cash he took off me and let me in.
I had to walk up a wooden slope inside;
I saw circles of people sitting there layer on layer.
When I looked overhead it seemed like some sort of bell-tower,
But a whirlpool of folk it appeared to me when I looked lower.
Some females there were sitting facing the stage –
Not calling the spirits down like they do in our country gambols,
But ceaselessly banging of drums and clashing of cymbals.

A girl came on and took a few turns about,
And presently fetched a whole troupe of others out.
One of them was a sort of beggar-fellow:

A black hat he had on his head with a brush stuck through,
And his face was all whited over with black stripes on it.
I couldn't but wonder what he were going to do.
From top to toe
A fancy-patterned gown he had on, too.

Well, he said a poem, and then another piece,
And did a recitation and sang a song –
All very clever, mind you, not a word wrong!
His old chin wagging away on all things under the sun!
And such witty things he said: he was really a one!
Then, as he was nearly done,
"I bow low before you", he says, "I touch my feet.
"The cooking is finished, you now shall have something to eat!"

Then in comes one dressed up like Gaffer Chang,
And this other one, changed now into a serving-man.
Well he walks and walks, says he's going to the city
Then on the way, in a door, spies a young woman – very pretty.
Old Gaffer makes plans how to get her for his wife,
And he sends this serving-man to settle the price.
But what they ask, of course, it's not silk or satin:
The talk's all of beans and cereals and rice.

He gets this old Gaffer in such a paddy-whack,
He don't know whether he should go forward or back.
But that serving-man plays them both just how he pleases,
Till old Gaffer he really begins to see red,
And busts a great skin-bat in two on his head.
Now surely, I thought, he'll have broken his crown.
I'm sure that that servant will take him to law.
I vow I ne'er laughed half so hearty before!

But while I watched this,
Dang me, but my bladder was bursting to piss.
But I held it and held it to watch a bit more,
And I laughed at that rogue till I nigh wet the floor.

The women musicians noted by the farmer must have been sitting on what the Lan Ts'ai-ho play calls the *yueh-ch'uang*.[18] In *Lan Ts'ai-ho* the nuisance-making Taoist walks into the theatre at rehearsal time and plants himself down on these seats near the stage. He is politely requested to move, because this is where the musicians sit: "Excuse me, sir, would you

[18] 樂床.

mind sitting up in the gallery or in the stalls? This place here is where the girls sit when they are not performing."[19]

At this point I think it is possible to resolve a seeming inconsistency in *Lan Ts'ai-ho* which so far seems to have passed unnoticed. When summoned to perform privately at the yamen in Act Two, Lan Ts'ai-ho indignantly objects that it is his birthday and that there are no less than twenty souls in his establishment, any one of whom could have gone in his place; yet elsewhere we hear only of the members of his immediate family performing with him. Indeed, it appears to be part of the duties of his two cousins, besides acting as *ching*[20] in the plays, to attend to the advertising and to the preparation of the stage before a performance. Now after the *cheng-mo* and the *tan*,[21] the *ching* were the most important actors in the troupe. Indeed, since the *ching* were exclusively concerned with dialogue and business, they must in some ways have been the most skilled and resourceful members of a company. Why, if Lan Ts'ai-ho's troupe was so large, was it necessary for these menial tasks to be performed by leading actors? The answer is, I think, that the large number given in Act Two was almost entirely made up of members of the orchestra. These were the females who sat on the *yueh-ch'uang*. It would be quite natural for members of the orchestra to act as stand-ins when more were needed on the stage, and the reason why players went to sit there in full view of the audience after playing supernumerary parts on the stage – messengers, attendants and the like – was not, as has sometimes been suggested,[22] that the *yueh-ch'uang* was a sort of open dressing-room, but because they were resuming their places in the orchestra. Tu Jen-chieh's old peasant, though he is too ignorant to know the term *yueh-ch'uang*, nevertheless gives a very clear picture of its occupants.

Tu Jen-chieh's sequence and the play *Lan Ts'ai-ho* both seem to imply that in the big cities of the Chin and Yuan periods theatres were often large, fairly permanent and fairly substantial structures. This did not preclude their occasionally falling down, sometimes with considerable loss of life;[23] but certainly one would be justified in assuming a solidly built stage with the possibility of a solid superstructure capable of taking fairly heavy weights.

[19] See *Wai pien*, p. 972. The term 神樓 parallels our "gods" and the "*paradis*" of the French theatre.

[20] 淨.

[21] 旦.

[22] *E.g.* by Feng Yüan-chün 馮沅君 in *Ku chü shuo hui* 古劇說彙, Shanghai, 1947, pp. 43–4.

[23] *Ch'o keng lu* records a ghastly incident in which "41 persons, 1 monk and 2 Taoists" were killed when a theatre in Sungkiang collapsed in the midst of a performance by the singer 天生秀 and her troupe. See T'ao Tsung-i 陶宗儀, *Nan-ts'un ch'o keng lu* 南村輟耕錄, SPTK edn. 24/1B–2A. Something appears to be wrong with the date of this entry which, in the form given, is non-existent; but there seems no reason to doubt the veracity of the account. 天生秀 is mentioned by Hsia Po-ho, who himself came from Sungkiang, in *Ch'ing lou chi* 青樓集, as the daughter of 天錫秀, famous as a male impersonator in "greenwood" plays.

I have already referred to the problem of the *pin-pai* in these early *tsa-chü* and I feel bound to admit that in two of the three plays in which the stringing-up occurs there is no specific reference to it in any aria. The exception is *Chin-ch'ien chi* (No. 2). In the *Te-sheng ling* of Act Four the *cheng-mo* sings to Wang Fu, his future father-in-law, who has just offered him a cup of wine as part of the marriage ceremony.

> "If you don't presume on your high rank to keep stringing me up all the time, I for my part shan't get on my high horse, but will hasten to bend my back meekly before you."

How reliable in fact is the *pin-pai* in these plays? Apart from arias the thirty plays which have survived in contemporary Yuan editions supply words only for the actors taking the singing roles, merely indicating, in the case of the other parts, that someone says something or that there is some dialogue or business, and even in the case of the leading actors, the words are often abridged or omitted altogether. For full dialogue we have to turn to the Ming editions, none of which is earlier than 1588.

If we compare the two versions of those plays which exist in both Ming and Yuan editions, we find quite significant differences. For example, if we compare the Yuan text of the play *Mo-ho-lo* (No. 79)[24] with that of *Yuan ch'ü hsüan*, we can deduce, even from the truncated scraps of dialogue which are all that the Yuan text supplies, quite radical differences between the two versions – so radical, indeed, that even the plot of the play is affected.

The story of *Mo-ho-lo* is about a young merchant who goes on a long business journey at the suggestion of a fortune-teller. He falls ill on the way back while sheltering in a ruined temple, and sends a travelling doll-maker, who happens to be sheltering with him, to take a message to his wife. The message is intercepted by his wicked cousin who comes to the temple and poisons him for his money. He then tries to win over the dead man's wife, and when she refuses, accuses her of the murder.

In the *Yuan ch'ü hsüan* version the wife, Liu Yü-niang, is falsely condemned at the end of Act Two for the murder of her husband by an anonymous local magistrate (*ku*).[25] Then at the beginning of the third act we are introduced to a new character, the newly arrived prefect of Ho-nan-fu, who is a Jurchid. He reviews the case and confirms the sentence. At this point the clerk Chang Ting, the play's chief character, whose role is sung by the actor who had taken the part of the little merchant in the first half of the play, appears on the scene and intervenes on behalf of the wrongfully condemned wife. Provoked by his criticisms, the Jurchid prefect sets a limit of three days within which Chang Ting must find the true culprit or else forfeit his own life, and the rest of the play is the story of his ingenious detection.

[24] 魔合羅.
[25] 孤.

Now when we examine the Yuan edition of this play it becomes quite clear that there was no such character as the Jurchid prefect in it, but that the same anonymous magistrate who appeared in Act Two was in charge of the case throughout. The whole scene in which the Jurchid prefect makes his first appearance and introduces himself to the audience in fact reappears, word for word the same, in the play *K'an t'ou-chin* (No. 39).[26] *K'an t'ou-chin* is also a play in which a person is wrongfully condemned for a murder he did not commit but finally saved by the astuteness of the clerk Chang Ting. It is, if you like, another Chang Ting play.

The first reaction of a person discovering this who was familiar with the literature about Yuan drama, particularly with the much-quoted letters and prefaces of Tsang Mou-hsün in which he seems to admit to a certain freedom and arbitrariness in his editing of these plays,[27] might be to suppose that he was responsible for most of the dialogue of *Mo-ho-lo* and that he arrived at this part of the text by simply importing it from *K'an t'ou-chin*. In fact, though, this conclusion would be quite erroneous. A careful collation of the *Yuan ch'ü hsuan* version of *Mo-ho-lo* with that of the other Ming editions in which this play appears shows an almost identical text. The oft-repeated strictures against Tsang Mou-hsün are for the most part ill-informed. Misguided though his "corrections" and "improvements" may be, their scope and nature is easily verifiable, and the wholesale dismissal of all his texts is far from being a scholarly proceeding. Particularly is this so when it is the *pin-pai* that is dismissed, since as often as not it is the text of the arias that Tsang has tampered with. Fortunately Yoshikawa Kōjirō and Iwaki Hideo have done something to straighten the record.[28] The fact of the matter is that nearly all the late Ming editions, including Tsang Mou-hsün's, derive ultimately from the palace versions of these plays kept by the *Yü hsi chien*.[29] If the dialogue in the Ming texts differs greatly from that of the Yuan originals, the responsibility for the difference rests not so much with the sixteenth and seventeenth-century editors, as with the Ming court players of a century or two earlier.

That the existing dialogue of the *tsa-chü* contains elements introduced by the Ming court players is a fact of which I recently came across conclusive evidence. In the play *Huang hua yü* (No. 156)[30] there is a scene in which

[26] 勘頭巾.
[27] Especially 寄謝在杭書 in *Fu pao t'ang chi* 負苞堂集, Peking, 1958, p. 92 and the first preface to *Yüan ch'ü hsüan*, *ibid.*, p. 55.
[28] See Yoshikawa Kōjirō 吉川幸次郎, *Gen zatsugeki kenkyū* 元雜劇研究, Tokyo, 1948, pp. 45–7 and Iwaki Hideo 岩城秀夫, "Genkan kokon zatsugeki sanjūshu no ryūden" 元刊古今雜劇三十種の流傳 *Chūgoku bungaku hō* 14 (1961), p. 80.
[29] 御戲監.
[30] 黃花峪. This wretchedly bad play shows every sign of having been put together by actors from bits of other plays – a circumstance which by itself, of course, has no bearing whatsoever on the date.

a brawl occurs in a country inn. At the end of it the innkeeper is left standing alone on the stage, and before making his exit he addresses the audience in these words: "Well, now they've all gone. I shan't be selling any more wine today. It's been nothing but trouble all day long. I think I shall shut up shop and go off to the *Chung-ku-ssu* to practise somersaults."[31] Now in another context Sun K'ai-ti has conclusively proved that "*Chung-ku-ssu*" and "*Yü-hsi-chien*" were different names for the same institution – the palace department at the Ming imperial court which had charge over theatrical entertainments. Its site was where the National Peking Library now stands, to the west of Pei-hai.[32]

Yet though there can be little doubt that the late Ming texts of Yuan *tsa-chü* which we read represent by and large the acting versions of the palace performers of the first half of the Ming period, it seems to me very unlikely, in view of the conservative nature of the Chinese theatre and the even more conservative nature of Ming court taste, which continued to patronize *tsa-chü* long after popular fashion had abandoned it in favour of the southern *hsi-wen*, that the court players made more than minor innovations in the Yuan tradition, such as the introduction of topical jokes, of which the above is an example.

As soon as we leave the library for the theatre, we must realize that the acting version of any play varies from one production to another. And if this is true for example of modern productions of Shakespeare, how much more must it be true of productions of the more primitive medieval theatre in China. There is absolutely no reason to assume that innovations made in the presentation of a play like *Mo-ho-lo* must *necessarily* have been introduced by Ming actors. They are just as likely to have been made by a Yuan troupe and retained in subsequent productions. Indeed, although it seems most unlikely, it is not inherently impossible that the version of *Mo-ho-lo* acted by the Ming imperial players and preserved in the late Ming editions may, apart from minor details, represent an earlier version than the one preserved in the Yuan edition. There is simply no means of knowing and probably never will be.

The texts of the thirty plays published during the Yuan period were, as Iwaki and others have plausibly suggested, probably intended to be used as programme notes, rather like the *shuo-ming* containing the text of the arias sometimes offered to modern audiences of *k'un-ch'ü*, or the words on a record sleeve.[33] When Cheng Ch'ien asserts in his preface that "it is essential to read these texts if you want to appreciate genuine Yuan drama and to

[31] *Wai pien*, p. 938.

[32] Sun K'ai-ti 孫楷第, *Yeh-shih-yüan ku-chin tsa-chü k'ao* 也是園古今雜劇考, Shanghai, 1953, pp. 99–103.

[33] *Cf.* Iwaki Hideo, *op. cit.* pp. 78–9.

know what the original appearance of Yuan drama was like"[34] he is allowing his enthusiasm to overcome his common sense. Our scholarly gratification at the discovery of an early text must not blind us to the possibility that it may be a very *bad* text. It is to the Ming editors, and above all to Tsang Mou-hsün, that we owe practically all we know about Yuan drama as such. In a description based exclusively on the Yuan editions there could be very little about *drama* at all.

Returning to my original question, then, I find little positive evidence on which to base an answer, but at the same time little to discourage the belief that stringing-up occurred in Yuan acting versions of the above-mentioned plays and was not an innovation imported by the Ming imperial players, and that it represents a stage effect which the Yuan theatre was capable of arranging and eager to exploit, like the trapdoor entrances and exits of the eighteenth and nineteenth-century European stage.

Postscript

Since preparing the above paper for publication, I have come across another example of a character in an early *tsa-chü* play being hung up on stage. In Act Four of *Huang ho lou* (No. 150) Chang Fei, who is justifiably suspicious of the part Liu Feng played when his father Liu Pei went unaccompanied to meet Chou Yü, has him trussed up and hung from a willow tree. Liu Pei returns and *some time after his entry* hears his son's cries and asks Chang Fei why he is hanging there. The action is deducible not only from the *pin-pai*, but from very explicit indications in two arias sung by Chang Fei. In the first he sings,

> ". . . I motion with my hand to the guards on either side:
> "Bind him with hempen ropes and hang him high up in that willow tree!
> "I shall wait till my brother returns without mishap; then we shall let you down."

In the second aria he tells Liu Pei,

> ". . . I set him up in the willow tree to hang there and watch for your return."

In the intervening dialogue Liu Feng protests, "I owe no corn or fodder, Third Uncle, why do you hang me up?" referring to the well-known contemporary practice of hanging up defaulting farmers until their families paid the rent or taxes owing.

It is hard to believe that some device was not employed in the presentation of this scene for tying up the actor playing the part of Liu Feng and raising him off the stage.

[34] Cheng Ch'ien 鄭騫, *Chiao-ting Yüan-k'an tsa-chü san-shih-chung* 校訂元刊雜劇三十種, Taipei, 1962, Preface, p. 1.