Stage and Court in China:
The Case of Hung-wu’s Imperial Theatre
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The student of China’s first full-fledged dramatic genre, tsä-chü, is confronted with a wealth of materials: 30 tsä-chü plays have been preserved in Yüan (1280-1368) editions, and many times that number of early texts have come down to us in a number of late Ming collections. In many cases we possess a number of different editions of the same text. Systematic though summary information on the authors of these plays may be found in a number of contemporary or near-contemporary catalogues. Though the genre came to full maturity in the second half of the 13th century, it continued to flourish all through the 14th century, despite the change of dynasty from Yüan (1280-1368) to Ming (1368-1644). Many Yüan authors lived well into the Ming, and quite a few new authors only emerged after the establishment of the new dynasty. In the case of most anonymous plays, it is impossible to ascribe them beyond doubt to either Yüan or Ming. Only after having entered the 15th century would the genre lose its vitality – though the Prince of Chou, Chu Yu-tun[1] (1379-1439) would still continue the tradition and show a remarkable productivity1. Tsä-chü, as the dominant genre on the stage, is by no means limited to the bare century of the Yüan, but rather extends its sway over two centuries, roughly from 1250 to 1450.

However, as soon as one is not only interested in a purely philological or literary study of the texts, but begins to ask how, by whom, and where these plays were performed, one is confronted with the fact that we have much less abundant materials to answer those questions. The sources most often used to shed light on these matters are the Ch‘ing-lou chi by Hsia T‘ing-chih[11] (± 1316—after 1368), a collection of short notes on the most famous courtesans during the author’s lifetime, in which be sometimes

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1 Studies of tsä-chü as a rule are limited to the Yüan. The best general study of Yüan tsä-chü is probably YOSHIKAWA Kôjirô’s Gen zatsuugeki kenkyû[2], Tôkyô 1948, also included in Yoshikawa Kôjirô zenshû, vol. XIV, Tôkyô 1968 (Chinese translation by CHENG Ch‘ing-mao[3], Yüan tsä-chü yen-chiu, Taipei 1960). Studies of Ming drama as a rule focus on the development of the so-called Southern drama, hsi-wen and ch‘uan-ch‘i[4]. Recently TSENG Yung-î[5] has published a survey of tsä-chü writing during the first century of Ming rule in his "Ming-ch‘u tsä-chü kai lun[6]", in Kuo-li pien-i kuan k’an-kan[7], I–3 (1972), p. 115–150; he has described the development of tsä-chü as a purely literary genre in the second half of the Ming in his: "Ming-tai nan-tsa-chü kai-lun[7]" in Kuo-li pien-i kuan k’an II–1 (1973), p. 95–144. A full list of the known tsä-chü authors, the titles ascribed to them and the preserved editions, with discussions of the early catalogues and collections, has been provided for both the Yüan and the Ming by FU Hsi-hua[9] in his Yüan-tai tsä-chü ch‘üan-mu, Peking 1957, and his Ming-tai tsä-chü ch‘üan-mu, Peking 1958. YEN Tun-i’s Yüan-chü chen-i[10] 2 vol., Peking 1960, makes abundantly clear how careful one should be in ascribing individual plays to a specific period and author.

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noted that their fame rested on their acting; a number of san-ch’ü of varying date, among which Tu Jen-chieh’s Chuang-chia pu-shih kou-lan is probably the earliest and best known; some fragments from the novel Shui-hu chuan; and two anonymous plays, the tsa-chü Lan Ts’ai-ho and the nan-hsi (southern play) Huan-men tsu-ti ts’o


A number of other san-ch’ü that are important for Chinese theatre history occur in an anthology published in 1351. About Kao An-tao, the author of a song-sequence entitled Tan hang-yüan practically no further information is available. His poem describes the visit of some high officials to a theatre where the company disappoints them. A critical text of this poem may be found in Sui Shu-sen’s Ch’üan Yuan san-ch’ü, Peking 1964, p. 1109–1111, there entitled Sang-t’an hang-yüan. It has been extensively annotated by Hu Chi in his Sung Chin tsa-chü k’ao, Shanghai 1957, p. 311–326. A Dutch translation, in places very tentative, may be found in the above-mentioned article by W.L. Idema. Sui Hsiüan-ming, on whom we have no further information, is given as the author of a san-ch’ü called Yung-ku that describes the actors’ life seen from the standpoint of a drum. A critical text of Yung-ku may be found in Sui Shu-sen’s Ch’üan Yuan san-ch’ü, Peking 1964, p. 547–548. An extensively annotated text and Japanese translation may be found in Tanaka Kenji, “Genday sankyoku no kenkyū”, in Tōhōgakuhō XL (1969), p. 1–114. For a Dutch translation see, again, the above-mentioned article by W.L. Idema. The troubles that may befall a gentleman when he and some friends summon an actress to a winehouse are detailed in the anonymous song-sequence Kou-shua hang-yüan. For a critical edition of the text see Sui Shu-sen, Ch’üan Yuan san-ch’ü, Peking 1964, p. 1821–1823. For an extensively annotated Japanese translation see the above-mentioned article by Tanaka Kenji, a Dutch version may be found in W.L. Idema’s article.


li-shen[28] which are both set in the milieu of actors and actresses5. The information from these sources is supplemented, to some extent, by scattered references in contemporary works6 and a few archaeological finds7. Little use has been made of those plays of Chou Yu-tun which are set in the milieu of actors and actresses, like the Fu lo ch'ang[32] and Hsiang-nang yüan[33]8, probably owing to the fact that the texts of these plays have been relatively inaccessible, and that in tsa-chü studies there has long been a tendency to limit the focus to Yuan plays, authors and data. However, some of the most used sources on theatrical life of the Yuan cannot be proven beyond doubt to refer exclusively to Yuan conditions. Both the descriptions in the Shui-hu chuan and those in the two anonymous plays Lan Ts'ai-ho and Ts'o li-shen might as well refer to the first as to the second part of the 14th century, and they do not present any clear contradictions to those in Chu Yu-tun’s plays. As is the case with the production of tsa-chü texts, we may safely assume a continuous tradition of theatrical practices from the middle of the 13th century until the beginning of the 15th9.

5 For a discussion of the early editions of the Lan Ts'ai-ho, see Fu Hsi-hua, Yuean-tai tsa-chü chüan-mu, Peking 1957, p. 290–291. A type-set, punctuated text may be found in Sui Shu-sen ed., Yuean-ch'ü-hsüan wai-pien, Peking 1959, p. 971–980. For an integral Dutch translation see W.L. IDEMA, "Lan Cai-he, een anonieme Chinese komedie uit de 14e eeuw", in Wilt IDEMA en Pim DE VROOMEN ed., loc. cit. (note 3), p. 108–132. The text of the Huan-men tsu-ti ts'o li-shen is found in one of the preserved fragments of the Yueang-to ta-tien. A type-set, punctuated edition is provided in Yung-lo ta-tien hsi-wen san-chung[29], n. pl. 1931. Two tsa-chü on the same theme as the Huan-men tsu-ti ts'o li-shen have been lost, a third, Shih Chiin-pao’s Tsu-yün-t’ing[30], has, as its heroine a chu-kung-tiao singer, but its value for theatre history is limited on account of the condition in which the text has come down to us and because the theatrical jargon seems in this play to be used mostly metaphorically to describe the love-affair central to the play.

6 The best use of these sources has been made by YOSHIKAWA Köjirō in his Gen zatsugeki kenkyū, Tòkyò 1948, in the section "Gen zatsugeki no teishū[31]", p. 54–84.


8 For a survey of the preserved editions of these two plays see Fu Hsi-hua, Ming-tai tsa-chü ch’üan-mu, Peking 1958, p. 59–60. Type-set punctuated editions of these two plays are included in WU Mei ed., She-mo-t’a-shih ch’ü-ts’ung erh-ch’i[34], Shanghai 1928.

9 Throughout the 15th century theatrical life apparently suffered a severe set back. The reasons for this state of affairs were no doubt primarily economic and political. The long civil wars accompanying the foundation of the Ming and the Yung-lo usurpation must have wrought much havoc. On both occasions some of China’s most prosperous regions were heavily hurt e. g. by the forced resettlement of its populations. The necessity of maintaining again, after a century of peace with the nomads of the steppes, large garrisons all along the northern frontier, and the continuing wars with the Mongols, must have posed a heavy financial burden on the empire. The active cultural policy of the Ming government aimed at the resinification of China, with its heavy emphasis on Confucian morality and the full reinstitution of the state examinations, no doubt increasingly

[28]宦門子弟錯立身 [29]永樂大典戲文三種
[33]香囊怨 [34]吳梅：奢摩他室曲叢二集

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As the data that may be gathered from these sources on the organization of theatrical life have already been summarized a number of times, I will here limit myself to a bare outline sketch so as to provide the background for a discussion of some early Ming innovations in theatrical practice, which will form the main topic of this paper. For practical purposes, it will be useful to discuss separately the situations obtaining in the provinces and in the capitals. Throughout the 14th century, most towns in China seem to have had a permanent theatre, often quite sizable buildings that also offered restaurant facilities. Even villages often had permanent stages. Temporary stages might be erected anywhere, usually on the occasion of some local festival. Most of the dramatic troupes were probably small-scale family companies, travelling around from festival to festival and sometimes performing for a longer stretch of time in one of the permanent theatres in town. There they would be a part of a day-long variety entertainment. The success of such troupes was often heavily dependent on the appeal of one outstanding member, whether male or female. Larger towns also had their own established population of actors and actresses. These geisha's and their male companions also performed in their own homes for visitors. Both travelling artists and local performers could be invited to restaurants, inns, or private homes to perform their repertoire. Both roving and resident actors and actresses had special (and low) legal status as yüeh-hu. They seem to have been exempt from regular taxes and corvée, but they could be summoned at any moment by the local officials to perform at their banquets, even if their appearance had already been billed at the theatre. The companies had at their disposal a large traditional repertoire of yüan-pen skits and tsu-chü plays. For new texts they could turn to the shu-hui organizations of well-educated practitioners of vernacular literary genres, which existed in many towns.

For the Yüan dynasty I cannot remember ever having come across a reference to the existence of private theatrical companies attached to some great household. After the founding of the Ming many princes kept their own private theatrical troupes. Chu turned the attention of China's intellectuals away from the drama. Moreover in Hsüan-te 3 (1428) it was strictly forbidden for officials in office to associate with actresses. When, from about 1500 on, China's economic recovery gained momentum, the Kiangnan area took the lead; and its Southern drama also became the most prominent genre, while the Northern tsu-chü had to leave the stage. Cf. Cheng Cheng-to, "Yüan Ming chieh chi wen-t' an kai-kuan" in his Chung-kuo wen hsieh yen-chiu, Peking 1957, p. 483-510; IWAKI Hideo, "Min no kyūtei to engeki" in his Chūgoku gikyou engeki kenkyū, Tōkyō 1972, p. 602-624.


11 Li K'ai-hsien (1501-1568) was convinced that in the Hung-wu reign imperial princes on their enfeoffment received 1700 plays, see LU Kung ed., Li K'ai-hsien chi, Peking 1959, p. 369-370. The Wan-li 5 (1587) edition of the Ta-Ming hui-tien, chiüan 56, p. 32-33 mentions repeated measures directed against the growing private troupes of the princes.
Ch'üan (1378-1448) and Chu Yu-tun (1379-1439) probably wrote their plays for performance by their own private troupes. In contrast to plays by Yuan authors which as a rule have a very small cast and require few elaborate requisites, their plays often require tens of performers and considerable pageantry, which makes these plays impossible to perform by geisha-houses or small travelling companies.\(^{12}\)

The situation in the capitals was different, due to the presence of the court and its attendant officialdom. This meant both a great concentration of artists and patrons, authors and theatres, and specific measures by the court to ensure its own entertainment by tight organization of the metropolitan actors and actresses. During the Yuan dynasty, the capital players were under the control of the chiao-fang ssu\(^{[46]}\), an institution with a history that goes back to T'ang times. All studies on Yuan drama I have seen are rather reticent on its organization and functioning during that dynasty. Its head, the chiao-fang shih\(^{[48]}\), was an actor in Yuan times and held a relatively high official rank. This latter fact repeatedly drew indignant comments from Confucian bureaucrats during the last years of the Yuan.\(^{14}\) To judge from the Ch'ing-lou chi, the actors and actresses in the capital that were registered with the Chiao-fang ssu lived outside the palace and could be visited by patrons. I assume they also performed in the capital's public theatres and were only brought together within the imperial palace to perform upon special occasions, with suitable advance preparation beforehand. If so, the Yuan would follow the practice that prevailed throughout most of the Southern Sung dynasty (1127-1273). Plays were performed in the imperial presence both in Ta-tu and Shang-tu. The description of an imperial banquet in the Shui-hu chuan may possibly refer to Yuan times, but the titles of the tsa-chü performed perhaps refer rather to the situation in Ming times.\(^{15}\) Apparently the imperial palace in Yuan times did not include a permanent stage. Nor is there any indication that the Chiao-fang ssu operated a theatre out-


\(^{15}\) Chu Yu-tun, in his Yuan-kung-tzu\(^{[49]}\), which he wrote in 1406 on the basis of information to him by an old servant that as a girl had served in the Yuan palace, mentions the title I-yin fu T'ang\(^{[50]}\) as a play performed at the Yuan court (Chang Hai-p'eng ed., *Kung-tzu hsiao-tsan*[51]) (Ts'ung-shu chi-ch'eng 2326) p. 7). In this he is, however, following the literary example of the kung-tzu\(^{[52]}\) of Yang Wei-ch'en (1296-1370) (see his *Tieh-ai hsien-sheng ku yüeh-fu*[53], chuan 14, p. 1b (*Ssu-pu ts'ung k'an* 1502)). Probably both of them merely wish to stress that within the palace, morally uplifting pieces were performed. Chu Yu-tun further mentions the now lost play *Shih Yü* shih chien *Wei*]kung by the playwright Pao T'ien-yu\(^{[54]}\); Kung-tzu\(^{[55]}\) hsiao-tsan p. 6). The titles mentioned in Shui-hu ch'üan-chuan ch. 82 rather closely conform to the repertoire that was performed at the Ming court.

\(^{45}\)*八木澤元：明代劇作家研究* \(^{46}\)*教坊司* \(^{47}\)*岸部成雄：唐代音樂歴史的研究，楽制篇* \(^{48}\)*使* \(^{49}\)*元宮詞* \(^{50}\)*伊尹扶湯* \(^{51}\)*張海鵬：宮詞小纂* \(^{52}\)*楊維楨* \(^{53}\)*鐵崖先生古樂府* \(^{54}\)*鮑天祐：史魚屍諫衛靈公*
side the palace grounds and open to the general public, as was the case in the Hung-wu era (1368-1398), as I hope to demonstrate.

The Ming government during the Hung-wu reign adopted a policy of strict regulation of the metropolitan yüeh-hu. In its attempts to resimplify China after a century of Mongol rule, it chose as its model the Sung, as is e.g. clear from the titles given to the officials in the Chiao-fang ssu and from the establishment at Nanking of sixteen state operated winehouses where registered sing-song girls comforted weary officials and stimulated the sales.

The winehouses would fall into disuse once the Ming capital had been moved to Peking. The Chiao-fang ssu, which continued to exist in Nanking, was reestablished in Peking and continued throughout the existence of the dynasty to perform its task of presenting musical and dramatic entertainment to the court on certain specified occasions. In this last aspect, the Chiao-fang ssu must be seen in contrast with the Chung-ku ssu (also called Yu-hsi chien) an eunuch agency established in Hung-wu 23 (1390), that might be called upon at any moment. The great majority of tsa-chü texts have come down to us directly or indirectly through this agency, which was still performing tsa-chü during the last years of the Ming dynasty.

Apart from the sixteen winehouses, the Hung-wu government also built the Fu-lo-yüan. As of the present, those authors who have treated the Fu-lo-yüan have, as a rule, described it as a state-managed geisha-house or bordello. But the Fu-lo-yüan had wider functions: it was a large compound to house the actors and actresses registered with the Chiao-fang ssu and it was closely connected with a theatre or theatres managed under the supervision of the Chiao-fang ssu and open to at least some segments of the general public.

The Fu-lo-yüan is described in Liu Ch’en’s Kuo-ch’u shih-chi. His short notice runs as follows:

T'ai-tsu (the emperor Hung-wu) established the Fu-lo-yüan near the Ch’ien-tao bridge. He ordered the men to wear green caps, red stomachers and hairy pigskin boots. They were not allowed to walk on the middle of the road but could only

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16 The Chiao-fang ssu was already established in 1367, see Lung Wen-pin comp., Ming hui-yao, Peking 1956, p. 340. Its officials were, as during the Yüan, actors. The various titles given may be compared with those during Sung e.g. in Kishibe Shigeo, Todai ongaku no rekishi-tekki kenkyu-gakuseihen, Tökyö 1960-1961, p. 405 and p. 417.

17 Hung-wu’s sixteen wine-houses are discussed e.g. in Wang Shu-nu, Chung-kuo ch’ang-chi shih, Shanghai 1936, p. 195-198; Iwaki Hideo, ”Min no kyûtei to engeki”, in his Chûgoku gikyoku engeki kenkyû, Tôkyô 1972, p. 605, H. I. Levy, A Feast of Mist and Flowers, The Gay Quarters of Nanking at the End of the Ming, Yokohama 1966, p. 18-19. A contemporary list of these sixteen winehouses, with details about their location, is to be found in the Hung-wu ching-ch’eng t’u-chü, p. 54-55 (original preface 1395, photolithographically reproduced Peking 1928).


19 The Kuo-ch’u shih-chi is a short collection of miscellaneous notes on the Hung-wu reign compiled by Liu Ch’en in the first year of the Yung-lo era (1403). I have used the edition in the Chieh-yüeh shan-fang hui-ch’ao ti-wu chi. The translated passage is found on p. 20a-b. (Chinese text at the end of this paper.)
walk on either the left or the right side. Sometimes he ordered them to act as artisans or to do on armour. The courtesans wore black headdresses and black jackets, they were not allowed to wear beautiful clothes when they went out. [The emperor] entrusted the management to a clerk for ritual matters, Wang Ti[64]. This man was well versed in music and also could write plays. It was forbidden for civil and military officials, and also to she-jen[65], to enter the compound and only merchants were allowed to visit it.

Once, at midnight, a fire broke out, and even the yamen of the t'ai-fu T'o-huan[22] burned down. It appeared that numerous illegally procured goods had been stored there. T'ai-tsu was enraged, and the officials of the treasury and the men and women in the compound were heavily punished. Later [the compound] was moved to a place near the Wu-ting[67] bridge[23].

As the officers and officials everywhere occasioned problems by their association with courtesans, T'ai-tsu had them all sent to the capital and placed in the compound.

If the Fu-lo-yüan had been merely a geisha-house, this would be a rather curious description. The inmates were both male and female. The regulations concerning their clothing roughly concur with those for actors and actresses as given in the Ming hui-tien, if one takes into account that these regulations were revised a number of times during the Hung-wu era[24]. We may therefore safely assume that the Fu-lo-yüan was the dwelling place of the Chiao-fang ssu's actors and actresses. The otherwise unknown (first) director of the Fu-lo-yüan, Wang Ti, is clearly portrayed as someone capable of supervising the correct performance of plays and of providing new texts if the occasion demanded them.

Further information is provided by the Hung-wu ching-ch'eng t' u-chih of 1398, an annotated list of government buildings in Nanking at that time, illustrated with maps. At the end of its list of state-operated guest-houses, after the poorhouse, it mentions the Fu-lo-yüan. However, it mentions not one, but two. The first is said to be located to the south-east of the Wu-ting bridge (p.568), and is doubtless identical with the one described by Liu Ch'en. The other is said to be located on the Eastern Street outside the

[69] 余懷 : 板橋雜記 [70] 板橋雜記，蘇州畫舫錄
[71] 鼓掌絕塵
southernmost city gate, the Chü-pao-men[72] (p. 56b). Perhaps this was a subsidiary compound, necessitated by T'ai-tsu's drastic measures to solve the dereliction of duty by his officers, as outlined in Liu Ch'en's last lines. The Hung-wu ching-ch'eng t'u-chih also mentions, immediately following upon the Fu-lo-yüan, two theatres (kou-lan[73]). The very fact that they are mentioned in the Hung-wu ching-ch'eng t'u-chih means that these two theatres were state-managed. The first kou-lan is said to be located to the east of the Wu-ting bridge (p.56b), so it was quite near the first Fu-lo-yüan. The other theatre was located in the south-western part of town, to the south of the Hui-t'ung[74] bridge. The building of two theatres may have been motivated by the forcibly increased number of actors and actresses in the capital, but in other cases too we encounter references to two theatres (cf. note 36 and note 40), conceivably the competition between them was expected to result in higher quality and larger crowds24a.

Now, the construction of one of these two theatres is celebrated by T'ang Shih[75] in a long and elaborate song-sequence, entitled A paean requested by the Chiao-fang ssu on the occasion of the reconstruction of the theatre (Hsin chien kou-lan Chiao-fang ch'iut-san[76])25. T'ang Shih's song-sequence is too long to present here in a complete translation; moreover, much of its contents are, as might be expected, rather uninformative simile. I find it, for instance, impossible to decide which of the two theatres is meant, the description of the location of the kou-lan in the Wu-sha[77] – in the southern part of town, opposite the Phoenix terrace (Feng-huang-t'ai), and encircled by the Ch'in-huai[78] river26 – is on account of its poetical vagueness equally applicable to both. However, the prominent reference in the description of the construction in the Ch'i-sha[79] to the use of fire-proof walls (feng-huo-ch'iang[80]) would seem to hint that this new theatre was built after fire had destroyed its predecessor. Most likely therefore the kou-lan near the Wu-ting bridge is intended, that probably was constructed at the same time when the burnt-down Fu-lo-yüan was moved to its site near the Wu-ting bridge. The theatre is described as a most impressive, large storeyed building, richly decorated. The performance of the various types of actors and actresses is characterized in the Erh-sha. From the description of the role-categories it is clear that yüan-pen and tsə-chüı

24a The Hung-wu ching-ch'eng t'u-chih places the yamen of the Chiao-fang ssu in the eastern section of Nanking, to the west side of the Imperial City (p. 32a). During the last decades of the Ming dynasty the yamen was located within the Compound, see Ku-chang ch'üeh-ch'en p. 26-27. 25 T'ang Shih, who lived during the second half of the 14th century and the beginning of the 15th century, was one of the most important san-ch'ü authors of his age. He also wrote a number of tsə-chüı plays, but these have not come down to us. He is, however, one of the few early authors of san-ch'ü whose collected san-ch'üı have been preserved. A critical edition of Hsin-chien kou-lan chiao-fang ch'iu-tsan may be found in Suí Shu-sen, Ch'üan Yüan san-ch'üı, Peking 1964, p. 1494-1496. A Dutch translation of the song-sequence may be found in W. L. IDEMA, "De opvoering van de Yüan komedie" (see note 3) p. 80-107. For an extensive prose summary, see W. DOLBY, A History of Chinese Drama, p. 65-67. Some of T'ang's other san-ch'üı are explicitly addressed to actresses associated with the Chiao-fang-ssu, see Ch'üan Yüan san-ch'üı, p. 1504 and p. 1534.

26 I suppose T'ang Shih chose the expression Yen-chih-shui[81], for purely literary reasons; I take it to be identical with the Ch'in-huai. The Ch'ung-k'an Chiang-ning fu-chih[82] (1880), ch'üan 7, p. 3a, mentions a Yen-chih-ho[83] as contributory to the Ch'in-huai.

were acted. The next section, the I-sha, details the various categories of visitors: young aristocrats, students just having passed the highest state examinations, rich merchants and patrons. This breakdown of the public makes no mention of civil or military officials, the group to whom it had been forbidden to frequent the Fu-lo-yüan. This allows us to suppose a close connection between Fu-lo-yüan and kou-lan, also suggested by the other sources: the Fu-lo-yüan housed the artists that performed at the kou-lan, both institutions being managed by the same Chiao-fang ssu.

Near the end of his poem on the Chiao-fang ssu’s theatre, T’ang Shih states that ”Its fame has spread to the northern frontiers, its renown is broadcast throughout the southern marches“. In view of the subsequent centuries of oblivion this might seem an overstatement, but in spite of the paucity of preserved materials, it must have been a well-known institution in the latter part of the 14th century. A description of this ”Imperial Theatre“ (yü kou-lan[84]) is found in the chapters 13, 14 and 15 of the 16th century novel Nan Sung Fei-lung chuan. This novel by Hsiung Ta-mu was composed by cannibalizing the Wu-tai shih p’ing-hua[85] and another text on the career of the founder of the Sung dynasty, Chao K’uang-yin – possibly the Chao K’uang-yin Fei-lung chi[86], which is mentioned in the Pak t’ongsa onhae[87] and therefore was in existence by the early 15th century. As the passage on the Imperial Theatre occurs in this latter component of the Nan Sung Fei-lung chuan, it could conceivably be a contemporary description. This adventure of Chao K’uang-yin in the Imperial Theatre shows a strong resemblance to Lei Heng’s adventure in a small-town theatre in Shui-hu-chuan (120 ch.) chapter 51. It is probably unnecessary to suppose a direct influence one way or the other, I would rather consider these two chapters to be independent versions of a topic popular in vernacular literature, the winehouse brawl, which these two respective authors have revied by situating the fight in typically up-to-date but anachronistic surroundings.

In chapter 13 we are told that the Southern T’ang offers two exquisite singsong-girls, Ta-hsüeh and Hsiao-hsüeh, to the emperor of the Later Han at Kaifeng. The emperor wants to raise them to the position of concubines and has an earlier favourite Han Su-mei sent out of the palace and entrusted to the Chiao-fang ssu. One of his generals protests and requests him to entrust Ta-hsüeh and Hsiao-hsüeh also to the Chiao-fang ssu. A sycophantic civil official Su Feng-chi thereupon suggests that the emperor build a kou-lan to house the two girls. This proposal is accepted, the yü kou-lan is built, the two girls perform there, and the visitors spend enormous sums. The novel adds that the two girls were often summoned to the palace to spend the night with the emperor, and also sometimes served Su Feng-chi.

28 See note 4.
Chapter 14 tells how Chao K’uang-yin and his friends visit Han Su-mei. She is living in the Chiao-fang ssu compound. This is apparently a large compound, including numerous houses, surrounded by a wall having only one gate\textsuperscript{30}. It may be simply called "The Compound" or the Chiao-fang ssu. Chao K’uang-yin spends the night with Han Su-mei and the next morning his three friends Cheng En, Chang Kuang-yüan and Lo Yen-wei\textsuperscript{89} come back to fetch him. They drink some wine and

"Cheng En said: “I just came by the Eastern Street. Everyone said that two actresses have recently joined the Imperial Theatre, one called Ta-hsüeh and one called Hsiao-hsüeh. Today they will perform tsä-chü. We should go and have a look” … Thereupon the four of them took their leave of Su-mei, left the Chiao-fang ssu and went directly to the Eastern Street, where they saw the Imperial Theatre. It was really marvellous! A poem describes it:

"Fine singers and good dancers are arranged on the front of the stage,
After only one tune the emperor is smiling.
Twelve storeyed buildings run into each other –
How much money have the customers spent there?"

Chao K’uang-yin… together with Chang Kuang-yüan, Lo Yen-wei and Cheng En came before the stage but all seats had been taken. Only one southward facing, brocade-covered dragon-chair remained unoccupied. K’uang-yin asked: “Who is sitting on the chair?” Kuang-yüan said: "That is the golden chair of His Imperial Majesty.” K’uang-yin said: "Let me go and sit on it.” Kuang-yüan said: "There are numerous soldiers around the stage. How will we get away if something happens?” K’uang-yin said: "What would it matter if I just sat on it for a while?” … K’uang-yin stepped forwards and sat down on the golden chair… Immediately the responsible official (chü-kuan) came out and cried: "You idiot! How do you dare to sit down openly on the Imperial Seat?” K’uang-yin became furious, shook his fists and wanted to hit him, but Chang Kuang-yüan hastily dragged him away, into the crowd. The soldiers wanted to go after him but they saw how angrily Cheng En glared at them. Lo Yen-wei and Chang Kuang-yüan effusely apologized …"

K’uang-yin’s sitting down on the Imperial Seat serves, in the larger context of the novel, as an omen of his own future emperorship. For us, the Imperial Seat is interesting because it strongly suggests that the actors and actresses registered with the Chiao-fang ssu not only performed for the emperor within the palace on the occasion of grand imperial banquets, appearing at other times in the Imperial Theatre, but that the emperor and his court would also come to the yü-kou-lan to watch performances. It might be possible that an early author invented the Imperial Seat, but in general the Chinese novelists were not very inventive in institutional matters. The story continues:

"Thereupon the string- and wind-instruments were played together, and the gongs and drums were sounded lightly in the theatre. Ta-hsüeh and Hsiao-hsüeh, who had been very elegantly dressed up, came out into the theatre to play tsä-chü… When K’uang-yin heard this, he came back together with Chang Kuang-yüan, Lo Yen-wei and Cheng En to watch from one side. They saw Ta-hsüeh first sing a song to the tune

\textsuperscript{30} This description also fits the various references to the Fu-lo-yüan in Kaifeng in Chü Yu-tun’s Fu lo ch’ang, a play that purports to portray the contemporary situation in that city (early 15th century).

\textsuperscript{89}鄭恩，張光遠，羅彥威
Lang-t'ao-sha... When Ta-hsüeh had finished her song, Hsiao-hsüeh also sang, in a beautiful voice, a song to the tune Tieh-lien-hua... When Ta-hsüeh and Hsiao-hsüeh had finished singing their new songs, everyone around the stage cheered. Hsiao-hsüeh had taken a plate made of hung-ssu stone and asked of everyone in the audience a contribution (ch' an-t'ou-ch'ien). All the rich visitors tried to outdo each other in their gifts. When she came at the left side to Chao K'uang-yin and his three friends, there was no one who showed but half a copper. K'uang-yin said: "Sing yet another song-sequence and I'll give you something for both performances." Hsiao-hsüeh said: "Every spectator in the public has already given something. Why should you alone break the law?" K'uang-yin furiously said: "I haven't brought money along today. Tomorrow I'll give you double." Hsiao-hsüeh said: "We need you here! Today you haven't half a copper to show. And you talk about coming again tomorrow. You won't deceive me, you ass!" Enraged, K'uang-yin said: "You common whore! How dare you insult me?" Cheng En got furious and also started to get out of hand. Ta-hsüeh and Hsiao-hsüeh, seeing that the situation was getting violent, hastily fled into the dressing-room. The soldiers surrounded Chao K'uang-yin and Cheng En but received a sound beating. The frightened spectators dispersed, and Chao K'uang-yin and his friends went out through the dressing-room, after which everyone returned home..."

As in the passage translated earlier, the mention of soldiers (kuan-chün), placed in the theatre and responsible for maintaining order, stresses the link between the state and this specific theatre. No other sources on public theatres mention the posting of soldiers (or yamen-rummers) within or around the building. Going through the auditorium to solicit donations from the spectators appears to have been the normal procedure for the actors and actresses in the 14th century for collecting their earnings; a number of 14th century sources refer to the practice and the only reference to admission charges occurs in Tu Jen-chieh's Chuang-chia pu-shih kou-lan, which dates from the 13th century.

The story continues with an account of Su Feng-chi's inquiry into the brawl. Su Feng-chi also writes to Chao K'uang-yin's father. In chapter 15 Chao K'uang-yin is sternly rebuked by his father. That night Chao K'uang-yin goes to the yü-kou-lan. When he has heard from a soldier on guard that Ta-hsüeh and Hsiao-hsüeh are spending the night there, he goes into the theatre and kills them, after first having killed two actors who blocked his way. After this Chao K'uang-yin and his friends have to flee the capital.

In chapter 43 of the Nan Sung Fei-lung-chuan a related episode occurs. Again the Southern T'ang dynasty sends two beautiful girls, this time to emperor Shih-tsung of the Later Chou dynasty. Shih-tsung ordered them to be put in the Imperial Theatre. This
time it is Chao K’uang-yin who memorializes against this procedure, but his warning goes unheeded. Shih-tsung also repeatedly summons the two girls to his palace to take his pleasure with them, and neglects his imperial duties. The debauchery of emperors about to be succeeded by more virtuous dynasties is, of course, a recurrent theme in Chinese vernacular fiction. If however, we believe that the other source which contributed to the Nan Sung Fei-lung chuan (besides the Wu-tai-shih p’ing-hua) dates from the late 14th or early 15th century, this double reference to an emperor’s summoning actresses to the palace for the night, may perhaps be linked to a specific incident in Hung-wu’s career. The biography of Chou Kuan-cheng[97] in the Ming-shih relates how Chou stopped a eunuch about to bring actresses (nü-yüeh [98]) into the palace. The eunuch acted on imperial orders, but Chou would not relent. The Hung-wu emperor, informed of the incident came out in person to praise Chou, and the girls were presumably sent back. The episode is not only meant to be of credit to the censor, but also to the emperor. The emperor’s excuse to Chou for summoning the actresses was that he wanted them to train the nei-chia [99] (which might either mean the palace-ladies or the eunuchs) 34.

But not only the entry of the courtesans into the palace is decried by the novel, the very existence of the yü-kou-lan is presented in the novel as a proof of a ruler’s moral degeneracy. Despite their often detailed descriptions of degeneracy, novels as a rule conformed in their verdict with the moralistic majority. The questionable status of the Imperial Theatre may well explain the lack of reference to it in the repeatedly rewritten shih-lu of Hung-wu’s reign. The author of the Nan Sung Fei-lung chuan gave free reign to his indignation when he had Cheng En burn down the pavilion Shang-hua-lou[100] erected by Shih-tsung in the palace garden so as to enjoy the two courtesans’ company.

Hung-wu’s Imperial Theatre must have been the first statemanaged public theatre in the history of the Chinese empire. But it was not wholly without antecedents. Yuan Hao-wen (1190–1257) in his Shun-t’ien-fu ying-chien chi [101], a description of the building activities undertaken by Chang Jou[102] (1190–1268), one of the four commanders who ruled over Northern China under Mongol supervision in the middle of the 13th century, at his residence, the present-day Pao-ting, mentions "two theatres" (yüeh-p’eng erh[103])35. This high patronage for theatres was probably financially motivated. In the biography of Hsing Chi[105], (1323–1379) in the Yüan-shih it is stated that when Hsing Chi was the Yuan governor of Hu-kuang, the residing prince and military commander of Wu-ch’ang had established a Kuang-lo-yüan [106]: "Here he brought together many famous courtesans and rich merchants, from whom he earned great profit"36. To judge by the name, the Kuang-lo-yüan could very well have been a theatre. One will remember that entrance to the Fu-lo-yüan was only permitted to merchants. It should also be pointed out that both T’ang Shih’s poem (I-sha) and the Nan Sung Fei-

34 Chou Kuan-cheng’s very short biography is found in Ming-shih, chüan 139, Peking 1974, p. 3983-3984.
36 Yüan-shih chüan 144 (Taipei 1969, p. 1536).

[101] 元好問：順天府營建記 [102] 張柔 [103] 樂棚二
[104] 臨山先生文集 [105] 星吉 [106] 廣樂園
lung chuan stress the amount of money spent at the theatre by the rich visitors. Hungwu’s Imperial Theatre, then, can best be regarded as a remnant from Chu Yuan-chang’s past as a warlord, temporarily kept on by the new and still money-hungry heavenly government to make its richest citizens pay the highest taxes with love. It was definitely not an innovation bringing hitherto lacking respectability to he theatre, performers and visitors – no parallel with European theatre history can be drawn. Nor does the institution of the Imperial Theatre seem to have had much influence on the subject matter or composition of plays. The prohibition of the deeds of holy and sage rulers, loyal ministers and righteous gentlemen as subject matter for plays, dated the 6th year of Hung-wu (1373) applied to “the Chiao-fang ssu and all the actors of the world”[37]. Moreover, typical chiao-fang-chü[107], the plotless shows to celebrate court occasions, were not written or rewritten until much later, in the Ch’eng-hua period (1465–1487), a long time after the Imperial Theatre had ceased to exist and also quite some years after the imperial princes Chu Ch’üan and Chu Yu-tung had created their gorgeous extravaganzas[38].

We know neither the year of the foundation of Hung-wu’s imperial theatre nor the date it ceased to function in Nanking. It is not impossible that in Peking in the first half of the 15th century a similar setup existed. In the explanatory notes in the Pak t’ongsa onhae, a handbook of Chinese conversation for Korean envoys to the Ming, it is stated that in Peking the Chiao-fang ssu was called the Li-ch’un-yüan[108] and it is said that “The Li-ch’un-yüan is the place where actors perform hsi-wen and tsa-chü”. Also two kou-lan are referred to[39]. Probably both “Imperial Theatres” fell victim to the general slump which increasingly affected theatre life in the 15th century to the extent that by the beginning of the 16th century for all practical purposes the permanent public theatre had disappeared, not to make its come-back until the late 17th century[40].

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39 The Pak t’ongsa onhae (photostatic reprint, n.pl.n.d.) which describes life in Peking during the first half of the fifteenth century mentions the performance of actors and actresses of the Chiao-fang ssu at a private banquet of - presumably - officials (p.14), and a visit to a kou-lan, with a list of the acrobatic and dramatic entertainments offered there (p. 139-142). In the latter case, nothing suggest a connection between this theatre and the Chiao-fang ssu. On p. 39, however, a “kou-lan-lane” is mentioned and in the commentary to the conversation, various sources are added to explain the expression kou-lan. First the kou-lan is defined as a theatre (p’ai-yu-p’eng[109]). Then it is said: ”The Li-ch’un-yüan is a place where actors perform hsi-wen and tsa-chü”. The quoted source specifies: ”The Li-ch’un-yüan is the Chiao-fang ssu”. The commentator adds: ”Peking has a tung-kou-lan and a hsi-kou-lan. The colloquial expression for staying with prostitutes is yüan-li tsou[110](to frequent the Compound)“, and then quotes again one of its sources saying: ”This is where the actors of the capital dwell“. These garbled notes would suggest that the Fu-lo yüan found its Peking successor in the Li-ch’un-yüan, a compound that served to house the Chiao-fang-ssu’s actors and included, or was close to, two theatres. The meaning of the expression yüan-li tsou is corroborated by the use of the word yüan-li in CHU Yu-tun’s Hsiang-nang yüan (She-mo-t’a-shih chü-ts’ung ii-erh-chi ed., p. 1a, 3b, 4b, 11b, 12a). This idiom is peculiar to the early Ming as it could only originate once the Fu-lo-yüan and comparable compounds had been established. Cf. Pak t’ongsa onhae p. 14. The name Li-ch’un-yüan no doubt derives, but should be distinguished from the expression li-ch’un-yüan[111], during the Yuan a frequent literary designation of a geisha-house.
Addendum

In the second passage translated from the Nan Sung Fei-lung chuan, after "Ta-hsüeh and Hsiao-hsüeh . . . came out into the theatre to play tsa-chü", I omitted a description in parallel lines of the performance of the actresses, as in the modern edition I used, and in a late 19th century woodblock edition I also consulted, it was rather vague, general description of song and dance. In an early Ch'ing edition of the novel, entitled Hui-t'ü Nan Sung chih-chuan[112], that I was able to consult during a recent visit to the Library of the Harvard-Yenching Institute, this description clearly refers to a dramatic performance on stage. The relevant lines might be translated as follows:

"Ta-hsüeh and Hsiao-hsüeh . . . came out into the theatre to play a story. What did it look like? You saw:

. . .

On the . . . stage the pretty girls acted and danced,
On the swing the beauties were swinging to and fro.
Music and song resounded at intervals within the coloured railing,
All kinds of instruments were played behind the red balustrade.
As a result the younger members of rich families were unable to tie up the horse of the will,
It sent the young relatives of high officials all following the monkey of desire.
. . . (chüan III, chapter 14, p. 25b–26a)

Unfortunately, two characters in front of "stage" are missing. The fact that a swing could be put on to the stage, implies that it must have been a sturdy stage. The low red balustrade or railing all around the stage was a typical feature of the early Chinese stage. The term I have translated as "young relatives" is the same she-jen as found in Liu Ch'en's Kuo-ch'u shih-chi.
Honolulu, Jan. 1977.

W. L. I.

[112] 繪圖南宋志傳

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Description of the Fu-jo-yüan in Liu Chi-en's Kuo-ch'u shih-chi (see pp. 180/81).